

Bhikkhu Ninoslav Nāṇamoli

MEANINGS

Essays and Letters on Dhamma

Path Press Publications

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DEDICATION

To Ñāṇavīra Thera

ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
CDB	Bhikkhu Bodhi, <i>The Connected Discourses of the Buddha</i>
CtP	Ñāṇavīra Thera, <i>Clearing the Path</i>
Dhp	Dhammapada
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
MLDB	Bhikkhu Bodhi, <i>The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha</i>
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
NDB	Bhikkhu Bodhi, <i>The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha</i>
NoD	Ñāṇavīra Thera, <i>Notes on Dhamma</i>
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn	Suttanipāta
StP	Ñāṇavīra Thera, <i>Seeking the Path</i>
SV	Ñāṇavīra Thera, <i>The Letters of Sister Vajirā</i>
Ud	Udāna

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Foreword

What is the Buddha's Teaching? The Buddha Gotama is recorded as having stated, 'Now, as formerly, I teach just *dukkha* and the cessation (extinction) of *dukkha*,' where *dukkha*, which should be left untranslated (it needs to be seen as such, not conceived), is the refractory default (mental) condition of all human beings everywhere and everywhen. So a brief statement of the Buddha's Teaching would be: 'Right here and now there is *dukkha* (which is *pañc'upādānakkhandhā* (the 5 appropriated aggregates)) but in this very lifetime *dukkha*, apparently so stable, permanent and complete, can completely cease (*pañcakkhandhā*).'

Two and a half millennia ago, over a period of some 45 years, this Teaching was alive, present-tense and responsive, issuing directly from present experience rather than memorized doctrine, a giving of advice and instruction as to how to go about bringing about the conditions that can allow this change from *dukkha* to its cessation, this radical simplification of experience, to occur. Even then, the task of the listeners was to overcome the resistance to taking the Buddha's Teaching personally enough, to bring the Teaching alive in their own experience, a task that became ever more obscure as the religion of Buddhism, a social and historical phenomenon related to but distinct from the Buddha's Teaching, came into being and grew, mutating and proliferating.

One of the traditions that developed as Buddhism grew was the production of 'commentaries' on those texts that claimed to preserve the Buddha's Teaching, the Suttas, with these commentaries attempting to locate and clarify the Buddha's Teaching and provide their readers with a clear understanding of that Teaching. Typically, commentaries on the Suttas are exercises in speculative intellectual system-building, delighting in the undeniable pleasures of the appearance of understanding and

orderliness—we can refer to these as scholarly or academic commentaries, and many of them have been influential in the long history of Buddhism.

Very rarely a different kind of commentary on the Suttas is produced, one that is not speculative, not academic, not system building. Such a commentary is therefore naturally couched in phenomenological terms and, rather than attempting to provide readers with an intellectual understanding of the Buddha's Teaching, leads the reader towards, and to some extent through, the work that can bring about a fundamental alteration in the functioning of experience. We can label these as experiential commentaries and at their best they will be exceptionally challenging and potent (and unlikely to be widely read, let alone comprehended).

A recent example of such an experiential commentary is Ven. Ñāṇavīra's *Notes on Dhamma*. The book you are now holding is a new example of an experiential commentary on the teaching found in the Suttas. Those who explore and apply the texts collected here are likely to find that activity truly rewarding.

Bhikkhu Nirodho
Thailand, 2557/2014

Editor's Preface

What does Dhamma *mean*? We all ask this question and read about it. However the more we study and listen to the various teachings, the more it becomes clear that what we are trying to grasp is very elusive and does not provide a definite answer. To keep some sense of the whole entity becomes almost an impossibility, and an ongoing struggle. Doubt always remains present and it continuously needs fixing. But how to realize the ideal *meaning*, if not by following what others have done and by fulfilling commonly-accepted techniques and views? What is the real meaning of existence and suffering?

Meanings is not a book to give direct answers to such questions. There is nothing here that you can take up as a belief, an empty speculation or a theory. The author, Ven. Ninoslav Nāṇamoli, refrains from *explaining* Dhamma, an act which he regards as mere psychological investigation and linearly-connected facts. Here is no intent to set up a fixed theory. What the author does do is *describe* the nature of experience as it is: not about this or that problem or fact in the world, but the experience as such—Dhamma, which has to be investigated with proper attention e.g. seeing the present simultaneous relationship of an arisen thing and its determination. With proper attention, the *being* of things is gradually revealed—and not understanding the *nature* of this being, the author says, is the fundamental ignorance. He then describes nothing but the nature, the *dhamma*, of things—not by looking for *the* meaning, but *understanding* meanings.

‘*Essays*’, the first part of the book, contains just that: descriptions of the experience. This is no doubt difficult material to digest: it demands that the reader *recognize* those described things in his own experience. Without

developed mindfulness and right attention, these writings will be impossible to grasp.

The second part of the book, the '*Correspondence with Mathias*', provides useful support in understanding the essays. This private correspondence has been taking place with a German friend, Mathias, since 2009. We believe that readers of this correspondence will find it very interesting and illuminating. It makes the Dhamma vivid, real, actual and personal and it opens up a whole new dimension of our existence which has always been there, but not really noticed. Most importantly, it offers a somewhat different approach to the common views and expectations regarding the practice of Dhamma, and this can prove useful to those who see the established mainstream Buddhist practice as inadequate in fulfilling the goal of the Dhamma—namely, uncompromising and transparent freedom from suffering. This approach also fulfills the Buddha's expectation that one's speech should be about dispassion, and leading to *nibbāna*.

The third part is '*Additional Texts*'. This contains questions posted on www.pathpress.org by people who wanted to understand the essays and sought clarification, with answers by Ven. Ñāṇamoli.

The articles and Dhamma exchanges are based on the teachings of the Buddha and the writings of Ven. Ñāṇavīra Thera. It is assumed that the reader is already broadly familiar at least with the Suttas; however the author says that Ven. Ñāṇavīra's *Notes* and the *Letters* (published in *Clearing the Path*) should be considered a prerequisite for understanding his writings in *Essays* (p. 416-7).

I have been aware of Ven. Ñāṇamoli's skills in communicating a phenomenological description of Dhamma since 2005, but it is only now that he has agreed to allow publishing of his essays, along with some of the letters. I believe this is invaluable material and I would like to thank him for permission to publish the materials. I would also like to thank all the correspondents for permission to include their letters; especially to Mathias, for his remarkable ability to describe his understanding and formulate clear questions. He surely speaks for many of us.

The work inevitably required some minor editorial work. Here I would like to thank Mathias and Michael Rae for their skillful assistance in editing and proof-reading. Thank-you also goes to a number of *bhikkhus*

and lay friends for support and assistance in the preparation of the book, especially to the publisher, Gerolf T'Hooft, and to Venerables Thaniyo and Araññabho. Finally I would like to express my gratitude to many donors who made this high-quality book possible at a low price—especially to Temduang Goodchild, Sompong Caine and Steven Ganci.

The translations of the Suttas referred to in the letters are:

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu: www.buddhanet-de.net/ancient-buddhist-texts/English-Texts/Way-to-the-Beyond/index.htm;

Bhikkhu Bodhi: *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (CDB), Wisdom Publications, 2000; *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (MLDB), Wisdom Publications, 2009; *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (NDB), Wisdom Publications, 2012;

Ñāṇavīra Thera: *Clearing the Path* (CtP), Path Press Publications, 2010;

Sister Upalavanna: www.metta.lk/tipitaka/index.html;

Thānissaro Bhikkhu: www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sutta.html.

Bhikkhu Hiriko Ñāṇasuci
February 2014

I

Essays

1

Feelings are Suffering

How should one free oneself from suffering?

The very first step that one should take is to learn how not to *crave* (*taṇha*) the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*). At first glance this might seem simple, but actually it is not so straightforward at all; for we cannot assume that an untrained, ordinary person even knows what suffering truly is.

In order to know suffering it is not enough just to suffer. To know suffering one has to recognize, within the present experience, what *is* and what *is not* necessary. The point is that, in the experience of pain, certain aspects are inevitable, while others are not. In other words—the ‘painfulness’ of pain is suffering and not the pain itself.

Let me go back to the opening statement that one should not crave the cessation of suffering; why is that essential? The *immediate reason* of our suffering, as the Buddha tells us, is our craving. It is because of craving that our experience of pain is *painful*. This applies to the other two kinds of feeling too: pleasant and neutral. Thus, we can say that it is *because of craving* that feelings are *suffering*. In the first type, unpleasant feeling, craving for the *cessation* of that feeling causes one to suffer: the painful feeling is present there, directly opposed to one’s desire for it to not-be, to disappear. In this way a discrepancy is created, a discrepancy which is nothing but suffering. In the second type, pleasant feeling, craving for *more* of that feeling is manifested, thus the *actual* pleasant feeling appears as unpleasant, when attended from the direction of that increased pleasure which is *craved for*. The present feeling of pleasure becomes inadequate, a lack which needs to be satisfied. Again the discrepancy

arises, which one tries to overcome by a further pursuit of various things in the world which will *intensify* one's pleasure further. One hopes that such attempt will 'fill the gap' within but, needless to say, that is impossible since the discrepancy is actually being constantly *generated* by the presence of craving and *not* by the various objects in the world.

*Saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo,
Na te kāmā yāni citrāni loke.
Saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo,
Tiṭṭhanti citrāni tath'eva loke.
Ath'ettha dhīrā vinayanti chandan"ti.*

“Thought and lust are a man's sensuality,
Not the various things in the world;
Thought and lust are a man's sensuality,
The various things just stand there in the world;
But the wise get rid of desire therein.” (AN 6:63/iii,411)

When it comes to the third type, neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling (i.e. neutral), suffering is experienced as a result of one craving *for feelings* themselves, since neutral feeling is not recognized at all:

Adukkhamasukhā vedanā ñāṇasukhā aññāṇadukkhā'ti

“Neutral feeling is pleasant when known [as such], and unpleasant when not-known [as such].” (MN 44/i,303)

So, to summarize, one's experience of pain is *not* the reason for one's suffering. Rather it is because of the presence of craving in one's experience that suffering *is there*. As long as this remains the case, one will be a 'victim' of one's own feelings, be they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

2

Existence Means Control

In order for something to exist (*bhava*), in order for it to be, in a full and appropriated sense, that thing has to be given first, in the form of an experience as a whole. When I say ‘given’, this should be understood in the sense that we can only ‘find’ things as already being there, in the world. The fact is that things can only be found when they are attended to and this means that—fundamentally speaking—they are *beyond* one’s control¹: one is not their *creator*. Thus one’s experience as a whole *cannot* be controlled; the most a person can do is to modify an already given state of affairs, on a more particular level.

Take the five-aggregates as an example: their nature is to appear, disappear and change while standing, at *their own accord*. It is only with assumption (*upādāna*) that this characteristic is obscured,² and in such cases the apparent self becomes the fundamental agent of this process instead, or at least this is how it appears to a *puthujjana*. One who is not free from assumption and self-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*) confuses the fact that the five-aggregates (or in this case the five-assumed-aggregates) can be *modified* or *affected* once they arise, with the notion that they are *controlled* from its origin. This notion of control also supports (or feeds) the view that ‘self’ is their creator, which in turn feeds that notion, and so on indefinitely. This is why with ‘self’ there comes the perception of *mastery* over one’s experience—“Attā, ‘self’, is fundamentally a notion of *mastery over things*.” (NoD, DHAMMA)

The self then, as a ‘master’, appears as something different, something *apart* from the five-assumed-aggregates. Furthermore the self keeps finding proof for its existence by constantly interfering and modifying

(when possible) the arisen states of the five-assumed-aggregates. The self finds pleasure in doing so.

On the other hand, if the self would see that, despite all the proof, its mastery actually *requires* (or *directly depends upon*) the five-aggregates, the notion of control would cease.³ It becomes clear that ‘self’ cannot possibly exercise any fundamental control over their appearing, disappearing and change while standing. This is why by contemplating this long enough, one can become an *arahat*:

Atha kho, bhikkhave, vipassī bodhisatto aparena samayena pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu udayabbayānupassī vihāsi... tassa pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu udayabbayānupassino viharato na cirasseva anupādāya āsavehi cittaṃ vimuccīti.

“Then, monks, at another time the Buddha Vipassī dwelt contemplating the appearing and disappearing of the five-assumed-aggregates... And as he remained contemplating the appearing and disappearing of the five-assumed-aggregates, before long his mind was freed from the fetters without remainder.” (DN 14/ii,35)

1. Even if one can control them, first they have *to be*. In other words—the *nature* of control is seen as something beyond our control.
2. As a matter of fact, it's not only the characteristic that is obscured, the five-aggregates are not seen either, most of the time.
3. For a *puthujjana* it is not enough to see this once. It is only with the repetition of this insight (achieved through effort), that the habitual view of control will disappear, and be replaced (gradually too) with the view of an *inherent* lack of control—the view of *impermanence*. When it is seen that impermanence underlies every project of the self, the self ceases to be self, since without its mastery, selfhood cannot stand. (Cf. *NoD*, PARAMATTHA SACCA, §6).

3

With Birth, Death Applies

We are born. We come into this world through our birth. As we shall see in the following paragraphs, there are many ways that one *can* think of one's birth. However, from a phenomenological point of view, our birth is always here *with* us. The fact that one is constantly engaged with the world of one's desires, decisions and miseries, means that one is born—birth is *present*. Obviously, for someone not used to thinking phenomenologically, it might be fairly difficult to pull oneself out of the habitual way of regarding things as if they were clearly defined and palpable in one's experience. For such a person 'birth' is an event from the past, and we shall address this issue in the paragraphs to follow. However there is also a simpler and easily overlooked reason for one failing to grasp the phenomenological description of 'birth'. In common language the term 'birth', as a designation of experience, carries certain *past* connotations. These connotations are absolutely gratuitous, and we shall see that the reason for that lies in people's *views* (*ditṭhi*). The established usage of terminology draws its significance (i.e. the meaning of its words) from the most *common* views (on the level of humanity or a particular culture), about the nature of experience. Needless to say, the common views are rarely correct, especially when it comes to the experience of an individual. These views can never represent the real *order of things*. Thus, apart from the way we speak and use language, nothing requires us to think that birth can, and shall *only*, be understood as a past event which has started and ended *in* time.

Naturally it is possible for one to regard, and understand to a certain extent, birth as something which has happened to one a long time ago,

even without having the actual memory of the event. However this kind of limited understanding is only possible in the *objective* (scientific) view of the world and oneself. We can even go a step further and say that it is precisely *because* of that view that one thinks of birth (and other things, including ageing-and-death) in these temporal categories. With this kind of view, the objective world in front of one, the world which is *in* time, takes precedence over one's experience as such, which is *of* time (cf. NoD, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, Dynamic Aspect, §5). One starts regarding the objects that appear *through* one's experience as something more fundamental than the experience itself—one puts second that which is to come first, and puts first that which is to come second.⁴ As a result of this one starts regarding oneself objectively as also being *in* time. Thus time develops into a category which has become *external* to everything, and all of the things appear as being 'within' it.⁵ Therefore one sees that others are born, the event of their birth occurs in time, when it is observed externally. But because a person views himself externally too, he naturally (i.e. in conformity with his view) comes to assume that his birth has *also* occurred some time ago in the past. One also assumes, since he can see it in his everyday experience, that death *will* happen to him in that same external sense, 'as it happens to others all the time'. By regarding things in this way, the person, as an individual, does not feel threatened by any of it (until the *actual* death comes of course). So we can see that one doesn't adopt this objective view voluntarily—when ignorance (*avijjā*) is present, the view is developed naturally as the quickest way of offering one assurance against a threatening world. The world and one's experience becomes explainable and measurable—one has *regained* control.

Let us get back to the phenomenon of 'birth', which we were discussing. The Buddha referred to 'birth' as:

Yā tesaṃ tesaṃ sattānaṃ tamhi tamhi sattanikāye jāti sañjāti okkanti abhinibbatti khandhānaṃ pātubhāvo, āyatanānaṃ paṭilābho—ayaṃ vuccatāvuso, jāti.

“Whatever birth, taking birth, descent, coming-to-being, coming-forth, manifestation of aggregates, and acquisition of [sense] spheres of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called birth.” (MN 9/i,50)

Thus, although we can agree that birth is some sort of a *beginning*, so to speak, a ‘manifestation of aggregates’, what obliges us to think that that beginning has *ended* there? The fact that one keeps accepting and using the five-aggregates, the fact that one is constantly involved with the world of one’s senses, doesn’t that mean that one’s *manifestation* of aggregates is still *present*?⁶ And would one be able to desire various things in the world, if those things were not manifested? If one were able to relinquish any attachment to one’s own body, would one be bothered when that body falls apart and dies? It is because one *affirms* that manifestation of the five-aggregates, through desire-and-lust for them, that the manifestation *exists*, that it comes-into-being—with being, birth is (*bhavapaccayā jāti*). When one regards it as ‘mine’, one ages, falls sick and dies (and also experiences any other misery possible in this life)—with birth, ageing-and-death (*jātipaccayā jarāmarañam*). If there is no being whatsoever, would manifestation be able to manifest itself? And if nothing manifested, would one be able to appropriate it? And if there is nothing which belongs to one, would one suffer on account of those things breaking up and disappearing? No, because one has escaped.

Let us go back to the question of when birth ends. Actually we can even ask when does birth start? The common view is that first one is conceived, and then, after nine months or so, things culminate in one being born. But when does the conception take place or when *exactly* is one born? Is it with the formation of an embryo or with the cutting of the umbilical cord? Generally the accepted view is that birth is over when the baby comes out of the womb and into the world. When it comes to ‘general views’, we all know that people often tend to blindly comply to them, taking them for granted for most (or the whole) of their lives, without even realizing they are doing so. In this case ‘birth’ becomes that which accords to the majority of opinions on that subject. One chooses to conform with ‘what everyone else thinks’, since the majority is ‘always in

the right'. One accepts Heidegger's impersonal 'They' as a dictator of one's own values, one finds *safety* in doing so. However no matter how secure the majority's view might seem, all it takes is for someone else to come along and say (perhaps supporting it with 'the latest medical research') that birth actually ends when the formation of an infant is completed in the womb and that coming out of the mother is not relevant as such, to question birth itself. (Though, for parents, even if they happen to be those scientists, this is probably *the most* relevant part.)⁷ If his utterance manages to change the general opinion, if the majority of people comes to accept it, we will have a new, 'more accurate' view on the nature of birth. The majority might have been wrong earlier, but now it is in the right... until it changes again. One can choose to conform to that majority and make a choice out of it but, no matter how far one goes, that choice will always remain *personal* and, as such, be on the level of *an individual*. So, although one thinks what everybody else does, one nevertheless remains *responsible* for that very thinking. It becomes clear then that by choosing the majority's opinion on a certain subject (in this case 'birth'), out of 'faith' in modern science (or religion) perhaps, a person chooses *his individual view* on a given subject. So, by deciding to accept the scientific explanation of birth, one decides that birth, for him, is something observable, an event in the world. Thus, whether one is aware of it or not, one is responsible for the *meaning* of things in one's experience. Even if we go further and say that we could pinpoint the exact *moment* of birth,⁸ when, for example, conception takes place, and even if the whole of humanity, without exception, agreed upon it, nevertheless this would not escape the *nature* of 'view', which is to be 'imposed' onto things in one's experience, while at the same time directly depending upon them. In our case that would most likely be the 'objective view', which is of course based on personal preferences and inclinations.⁹ Thus, for a *puthujjana*, coming-out-of-womb *is that* which is birth. His birth *exists*.

The Buddha, on the other hand, talks about the *nature* of birth, as a phenomenon (*dhamma*) in one's experience. He does not refer to birth as an occurrence in time, upon which even *puthujjanas* cannot agree, and this can be seen from the usual *paṭiccasamuppāda* description. In this description *jāti* refers to that 'nature' of birth and any temporal events are

completely irrelevant to it. If there is no ‘birth’ whatsoever, if there is no manifestation (as such) of the aggregates, a *puthujjana* would not be able to regard any event (in this case ‘coming-out-of-womb’) as *his*¹⁰ birth.¹¹ Thus one doesn’t suffer on account of birth as an event in the past, one suffers on account of the *nature* of birth in the *present*. In *paṭiccasamuppāda* context ‘birth’ structurally *precedes* ‘ageing-and-death’. ‘Ageing-and-death’ is not ‘birth’, but they would not be without it—together they arise, together they cease. So it is that with ‘birth’, ‘ageing-and-death’ (and ‘sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair’) *apply*. Consequently, if we were to discuss *jāramaraṇaṃ*, we could say that it is because ageing-and-death is *present*, that one will age and die (and suffer) *in* time. But if one could manage, through an understanding of the Dhamma, to free oneself from ‘being’—to bring it to an end—‘birth’ and ‘ageing-and-death’ would cease to exist: all of the temporal occasions for suffering would cease to be *one’s own* suffering, since by not-being-born, one doesn’t have the desire to interfere with them any more—one is free.

Let me just say something more, for those who find it difficult to accept that the existential (phenomenological) method¹² can validly be applied to Dhamma. We can put aside Sartre, Heidegger and those like them, and disregard what they have to say about birth. However, even in that case, we still need look no further than the *paṭiccasamuppāda* description in order to see what the Buddha meant by ‘birth’. In MN 9/i,50 it is said, as we already referred to it earlier on:

Yato kho, āvuso, ariyasāvako evaṃ jātiṃ pajānāti, evaṃ jātisamudayaṃ pajānāti, evaṃ jātinirodhaṃ pajānāti, evaṃ jātinirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti, so sabbaso rāgānusayaṃ pahāya ... pe ... dukkhassantakaro hoti-ettāvatāpi kho, āvuso, ariyasāvako sammādiṭṭhi hoti, ujugatāssa diṭṭhi, dhamme aveccappasādena samannāgato, āgato imaṃ saddhammaṃ’ti.

“When a noble disciple has thus understood birth, the origin of birth, the cessation of birth, and the way leading to the cessation of birth... he here and now makes an end of suffering. In that way too a noble disciple is one of right view... and has arrived at this true Dhamma.”

Thus a noble disciple, an *ariyasāvaka*, can, by understanding ‘birth’, in the same sense that he would have understood the four noble truths—directly and timelessly—free himself and become an *arahat*. So one may rightly ask now: would this be possible if ‘birth’ were not already somehow *present*,¹³ as a phenomenon, in our experience? How would one be able to understand birth directly and without involving time? If one’s birth was indeed a distant event, in some maternity ward perhaps, one’s fate would be sealed, according to MN 9, since the event of birth has already passed and cannot possibly be understood directly. Fortunately one’s birth is not *in* the past, so one can, if one chooses to follow the Buddha’s Teaching, cease to, in the present, regard ‘birth’ as his and by doing so remove himself from the domain of ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. One can escape.

* * *

See also: [Questions on ‘With Birth, Death Applies’](#).

4. Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge Classics, 2007, p. 82): “I detach myself from my experience and pass to the *idea*. Like the object, the idea purports to be the same for everybody, valid in all times and places, and the individuation of an object in an objective point of time and space finally appears as the expression of a universal positing power. I am no longer concerned with my body, nor with time, nor with the world, as I experience them in antepredicative knowledge, in the inner communion that I have with them. I now refer to my body only as a idea, to the universe as idea, to the idea of space and the idea of time. Thus ‘objective’ thought (in Kierkegaard’s sense) is formed—being that of common sense and of science—which finally causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and the natural sequel. The whole life of consciousness is characterized by the tendency to posit objects, since it is consciousness, that is to say self-knowledge, only in so far as it takes hold of itself and draws itself together in an identifiable object. And yet the absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it.”
5. Time, as a phenomenon in one’s experience, is regarded as more primordial (read—‘permanent’), than the experience of things. The things seem to come and go, while the *sense* of time stays.
6. Furthermore, nothing obliges us to think that ‘manifestation of aggregates’ refers to the *event* of coming-out-of-womb. The Buddha has said that *yato ca kho, bhikkhave, mātāpitāro ca sannipatitā honti, mātā ca utunī hoti, gandhabbo ca paccupaṭṭhito hoti—evaṃ tiṇṇaṃ sannipātā gabbhassāvakkanti hoti*, “when mother and father come together and the mother is in season and the one to be tied is present, with the coming together of these three things, there is descent into the womb” (MN 38/i,265-66). Thus the five-aggregates are already manifested, in a way, even at the stage of an embryo, and before the infant is formed. (Cf. also AN 3:61/i,176-7.)
7. And therefore it is not *accidental* that this is most commonly regarded as birth.
8. This, in itself, is clearly impossible, since the ‘exactness’, in any area of science, is determined by the capacities of one’s perception (i.e. the refinement of our technology and observational instruments). (Cf. NoD, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, Static Aspect, §16.)
9. It is very unlikely that the whole of humanity could actually agree on this (or anything), since all people are *not* the same. The birth of a baby, in this case, carries different *significance* for different *individuals*. A *mother* might say that her baby was born the moment she held it in her arms, and that it was conceived the moment she fell in love with its father. A *scientist*, in his carefully cultivated attitude of disinterestedness, might say that a baby is conceived when embryo cells become discernible (he observes it under his microscope!), and perhaps that it is born when it starts to breathe independently. For a *doctor*, involved in performing abortions, there is no question of ‘baby’ (i.e. ‘human’), until three months are due. Thus it is how one *feels* towards ‘birth’, how one *perceives* it, how one *intends* it, that *determines* what that birth is for him. (*Phuṭṭho, bhikkhave, vedeti, phuṭṭho ceteti, phuṭṭho sañjānāti*, “Contacted, monks, one feels; contacted, one intends; contacted, one perceives” (SN 35:93/iv,69).) Also, compare the passage from the MN 18/i,111-112:

Cakkhuñcāvuso, paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vitakketi, yaṃ vitakketi taṃ papañceti, yaṃ papañceti tattonidānaṃ purisaṃ papañcasaññāsaṅkhā samudācaranti atitānāgatapaccuppannesu cakkhuviññeyyesu rūpesu.

“Dependent on the eye and forms (ear, nose...) eye consciousness arise. The meeting of three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling. What man feels, that he perceives. What he perceives, that he thinks about. What he thinks about that he diversifies. With what he diversified as the source calculations about perceptions of diversification occupy a man with respect to past, future and present.”

10. Compare this passage from J.-P. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, the chapter on ‘Freedom and Responsibility’: “Yet I find an absolute responsibility for the fact that my facticity (here the fact of my birth) is directly inapprehensible and even inconceivable, for this fact of my birth never appears as a brute fact but always across a projective reconstruction of my for-itself. I am ashamed of being born or I rejoice over it, or in attempting to get rid of my life I affirm that I live and I assume this life as bad. Thus in a certain sense I *choose* to be born. This choice itself is integrally affected with facticity since I am not able not to choose, but this facticity in turn will appear only in so far as I surpass it toward my ends. Thus facticity is everywhere, but inapprehensible; I never encounter anything except my responsibility. That is why I can not ask, “Why was I born?” or curse the day of my birth or declare that I did not ask to be born, for these various attitudes towards my birth—i.e., toward the *fact* that I realize a presence in the world—are absolutely nothing else but ways of assuming this birth in full responsibility and of making it *mine*.”
11. This can be stated even more precisely: the temporal things (events in time) are possible *only* because there is an atemporal structure (*nature* of time)—time is *secondary* to one’s experience. Hence, the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is said to be *akālika*, ‘timeless’. (Cf. NoD, A NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA & FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE.) That is why, in the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, MN 9, we can see that a noble disciple can, by understanding ‘being’, ‘birth’ or ‘ageing-and-death’ respectively, come to the same result—complete freedom from suffering, *arahatship*. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* can be understood by understanding all or *any* of its ‘pairs’, since each of them represent, or rather *are*, the principle of simultaneous dependent origination—*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti*, “when this, this is”.
12. We are not interested in the conclusions (or lack of them, as Ven. Ñāṇavīra would say) they drew from the method itself.
13. Cf. NoD, A NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA, §§9 & 10. This ‘somehow’ is important to note. If a *puthujjana*, who is not satisfied with the idea of birth being something which occurred in his past, admits that there *has to be* some other way in which ‘birth’ can be present, and if he admits that he doesn’t see that way, he might make the *effort* to find it out, and then eventually see it.

4

Appearance and Existence

For a *puthujjana* the world exists. He can perceive things in that world, see them appear and disappear, he can see them changing. A *puthujjana* can also affect his surroundings and modify things according to his own preferences, pursue the desirable experiences and avoid the undesirable ones—the *puthujjana* is *involved*. This ‘involvement’ with things represents the very core of the *puthujjana*’s ‘experience as a whole’. Most people spend the majority of their lives obliviously absorbed in it, taking the course of ‘involvement’ for granted.¹⁴

It needs to be understood that these ‘objects’, which the *puthujjana* is fundamentally involved with, are *things* which his experience is inseparable from, simply because they are *his experience of those things*. For this reason we have to broaden the meaning of the term ‘things’, from usually denominating ‘objects’ in one’s surroundings, to include *any* experience whatsoever that arises and can be discerned internally or externally (whether it is ‘objects’, ‘tools’, ‘emotions’ or ‘thoughts’). In this way the term ‘things’ will correspond to what is meant by the Pāli term ‘*dhamma*’. Thus the experience of the *puthujjana*’s everyday world, his possessions, his desires and fears, anxieties and happiness are all *things* or *phenomena*. All these phenomena are completely *unknown* in their *nature*. This is why it is crucial for a *puthujjana* to recognize that a nature of a thing *exists*. This existence is not ‘in’ the world of the objects that are ready-to-hand, not ‘in’ his mind, not even between the two—but a thing that exists as an *experience*. Strictly speaking that’s all that can be truthfully said, without resorting to presupposed theories, inductive observations and explanations of the experience—the only thing that a

puthujjana can know for certain is that ‘there is an experience’. In this way it can be seen that a thing *is*, its ‘being’ appears, and things such as pleasure, pain, emotional states, ideas, abstractions etc. that people have in their everyday lives, are in this way all *real*, they all come to exist as something that is there, that has *appeared*. No matter how ordinary or extraordinary one’s experience is or might be, whether it is common or unusual, that experience exists *as such*. Even if one is going through the most obscure, ambiguous states of mind, those very states are valid in their nature (as obscure, as ambiguous); whether they are intimate and subjective or the most impersonal objective facts—they are all *phenomena*, they constitute the experience as a whole (which is also a *phenomenon*).

“We do not know what ‘Being’ means. But even if we ask, ‘What is “Being”?’, we keep within an understanding of the ‘is’, though we are unable to fix conceptually what that ‘is’ signifies. We do not even know the horizon in terms of which that meaning is to be grasped and fixed. *But this vague average understanding of Being is still a Fact.*

However much this understanding of Being (an understanding which is already available to us) may fluctuate and grow dim, and border on mere acquaintance with a word, its very indefiniteness is itself a positive phenomenon which needs to be clarified.”¹⁵

The same is to be said for the even more complex categories of the *puthujjana*’s world, such as ‘actions’, ‘choices’, notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and similar. They are not exempt from the phenomenological nature of things. Good or bad, skilful or not, these things *manifest* in one’s experience and, as such, they are real.

A very common passage from the Suttas describes that which is known as the ‘mundane’ right view:

Atthi dinnam, atthi yittham, atthi hutam, atthi sukata dukkaṭānaṃ kammānaṃ phalaṃ vipāko, atthi ayam loko, atthi paro loko, atthi mātā, atthi pitā, atthi sattā opapātikā, atthi loke samaṇabrāhmaṇā sammaggatā sammāpaṭi-pannā ye imaṇca lokam paraṇca lokam sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā pavedentī’ti.

“There is what is given and what is offered and what is sacrificed; there is fruit and result of good and bad actions; there is this world and the other world; there is mother and father; there are spontaneously reborn beings; there are in the world good and virtuous recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world.” (MN 117/iii,72)

This easily overlooked passage offers a very acute description of an *authentic* attitude of a *puthujjana*—the attitude of recognition and acknowledgment of the existence of things *as* phenomena (“*there is...*”). Someone might argue that one does not necessarily see the spontaneously reborn beings for example, but the point is that one should recognize the mere fact that there *could be* spontaneously reborn beings—the *possibility* of spontaneously reborn beings *exists* as such. If one recognizes the validity of the appearance and existence of that possibility, an *expectation of the concrete proof* that can be obtained only through the *senses* (i.e. one needs to *see* those beings) ceases to be relevant. In the same way one’s view that a thing exists only if it can be experienced through the senses ceases. This attitude thus discloses the *priority* of the *phenomenal nature of things* (of one’s experience) over any other view which does not assert that priority. It is because of this very lack of the correct priority that these kinds of views are *wrong views* (as far as freedom from suffering is concerned). Thus, whatever one’s experience is, whichever shape it might take—big or small, important or not, clear or ambiguous—that experience is *there* in its own phenomenological form. This by no means implies that such experience is necessarily understood, it simply means that it is recognized for what it is, even if that is as ‘something-which-is-not-understood’. This kind of ‘acknowledgement’ is the authenticity that we also find the existential philosophers often referring to. Together with authenticity, there comes the sense of the *fundamental responsibility* for one’s own existence¹⁶ which is a necessary prerequisite for a *puthujjana*’s ‘mundane’ right view¹⁷ (which can then lead further onwards toward the ‘supramundane’ right view—the view of the Path). The reason why this attitude is a necessary prerequisite is because, only with this attitude, will

a *puthujjana* be able to *understand* that he *does not understand*, and by doing so prepare himself for understanding.¹⁸ The problem is, however, that if a common man denies that which is right in front of him in his day-to-day living, he denies the basic principles of his own experience. In other words, he is denying the most immediate *appearance* of things. This results in phenomena not being seen at all. As long as this attitude persists, that man is going to be deprived of the possibility of understanding the nature of the experience and consequently the nature of his own suffering. That man is *inauthentic*.¹⁹ As the experience shows us, this is all too easily done. All that is required is to simply never question the face value of one's views of the world and the experience, and to never look further from one's immediate absorption in things.

For inauthentic man, when he does think about the nature of his experience and the world around him, his views would generally pertain to a common notion of a *hidden reality* behind the everyday world (either material or mental, depending on the direction his mind takes). What is meant by this is that he simply *assumes* that there is something *more* real or fundamental in relation to what he is, or can experience. Simply put, if he was to assume a 'mental' type of reality, as something which underlies the present experience, he would fall into (one of the forms of) *idealism*; alternatively, if reality was to have a more 'material' basis, he would fall into some form of *materialism* (or *realism*).²⁰ Either way, the *puthujjana* oscillates between the two.

For example, in present times, a spiritual/mystical view of the hidden 'Reality' (one's 'True Self', or 'Universal Consciousness') would be a form of idealism, while the very common and prevalent scientific objectification of the experience would most certainly come under materialism. These two can serve as the two prominent poles of the wrong view spectrum.²¹ These views differ from the right view because they are focused on developing and providing *explanations* of the nature of one's experience, while failing to see that fundamentally they are *derived from it*. No matter how plausible and accurate a theory or an explanation of the origins and nature of the experience is, the fact is that experience, as a phenomenon, will always *have to come first*. This means that the explanation cannot be applied *retrospectively* to describe its own origin

which is *simultaneously present*. Nevertheless, by maintaining this contradiction (which is an *assumption*), the actual *structural order* of the experience is assumed *different*. Since that's all a *puthujjana* has in front of him, that *assumed nature* of the experience *exists as such*. Because of this the nature of a wrong view is to provide a man with reasons and causes, which achieves nothing except concealing and contradicting the notion of the immediate appearance of things and one's own existential responsibility. When Reality is hidden behind the appearances, which are then no more than 'illusory', whatever a *puthujjana* does and whatever he feels ceases to be *relevant*, even if it's the most immediate and personal suffering. If it isn't irrelevant just yet, a person with this kind of view will certainly strive in order to make it so, by blending it into the all-embracing view that the world is nothing more than an illusion and, as such, whatever comes to be experienced in that world is disregarded because it doesn't belong to Reality. Consequently, by not pertaining to Reality, the things in one's environment can be ignored, and one will feel justified in doing so. Thus, for a *puthujjana* of this kind, things encountered in everyday life don't fit into his *view of reality*—they are dismissed, they are *not understood*.²² In the view of scientific objectification, on the other hand, the *puthujjana's* actions are neatly explained in terms of various collections of nerve impulses, reflexes, genes, sensations and so on. In this case the significance of one's actions cannot extend beyond the threshold of the molecular compounds of one's body, which then serves as the *reason* (or *excuse*) for the *puthujjana's* desires, emotions, concerns etc.²³ In both types of views the responsibility for the immediate intentions and decisions is abolished, by way of being included in the mystical or molecular forms (for example 'God's Will' or genetic 'predispositions')—which serve to explain one's world. In either case responsibility is not *felt*, its *nature* is *disowned*. (Might this perhaps be the *real purpose* of these views?) Thus the inauthenticity remains for as long as there is a view which places itself *over* the existence as such, as something which is more primordial in itself: the Reality *behind* or *beneath* the appearance; the molecular structure of the world *beneath* the things in the way we encounter them in the world. Consequently things like 'good' or 'bad', 'results' (of one's actions), 'being reborn', 'sacrifice', 'other world'

and so on²⁴ have no place in one's experience.²⁵ As such they become very ambiguous categories of one's life, which an individual can choose to accept and believe in, or perhaps reject according to his personal choice. (The overall decline of morality in the world indicates which kind of choice prevails.) In this way these things are pushed into the domain of religion and ethics, and regarded as 'convictions' and 'observances' that one can follow if one pleases.

Thus, whenever the priority of existence is not recognized, the *nature* of things is obscured. Clearly the practice of Dhamma is then out of the question. Nevertheless, for a *puthujjana*, the possibility of seeing the structural priority of existence as a whole over the particular instances his self derives from it still remains and, only when he admits this, the real work can begin.

THE APPEARANCE IN ITS PRIORITY

So, with the mystical view at one end, and the objective, scientific view at the other, the recognition of one's personal existence cannot arise. Because of these inauthentic attitudes, which are nevertheless *normal* attitudes of the *puthujjana*'s everyday life, it would be correct to say that, for him, things don't even *exist*, in the correct sense of that word. Only with the development of the rudimentary notions of authenticity, through the practice of mindfulness, restraint and reflection, can a *puthujjana* begin to notice, little by little, the nature of his experience as a whole—*phenomena* can start to *appear*. It is only in this way that one can understand what is meant by the 'being' of things, which is nothing fundamentally different than the 'being' of myself.²⁶ Through achieving authenticity, a *puthujjana* can observe that things around him, and his experience as a whole, appear and disappear. In the beginning it seems like this is happening while his *sense of the experience as a whole* stays *unchanged*. This 'unchangedness' holds priority over the *puthujjana*'s experience and that's because, in its nature, it presents itself as something that remains the *same* or *independent* (i.e. unchanging) throughout the appearance of things which come and go. It looks as if things that appear

are ‘included’ within that general non-changing sense of the experience. The appearance of things—or, simply, things—*belongs* to it. Although there is no concealed ‘being’ behind that which appears since the basic authenticity has been established, this nevertheless results in the notion that fundamentally things *are*, and *that is why* they appear. Thus ‘being’ is assumed to be an ontological phenomenon that manifests itself *through* the ‘appearance’. One might not be able to find it apart from appearance, but nevertheless, a *puthujjana* thinks: things exist, that’s why they can appear. In this way one assumes the ontological priority of existence over the appearance. Thus a *puthujjana* places ‘being’ as that which is *first*. This type of priority of ‘being’ is the necessary basis for the *puthujjana*’s sense of ‘self’. The notion of constancy, the unchanging nature of the experience as a whole, the independence, is the “extra-temporal changeless ‘self’”²⁷ of the *puthujjana*. ‘(The being of) self’ is then the reason for things to appear, they are appearing *for* it.²⁸ This arrangement, this particular [dis]order of things is also called: *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*.

If, presumably, a *puthujjana* wants to abandon this view, which is the root of all suffering, the authentic pursuit must continue. What he has to see is that this notion of ‘self’, despite its independent character, also *appears*. No matter how elusive or ambiguous it might be—it has to be seen as such: as an elusive thing. Only after this is it possible for a *puthujjana* to see that the order of things imposed by the presence of an assumed ‘extra-temporal’ phenomena in his experience is the *wrong order*. Based on things’ appearance, and based on the sense of the experience as a whole, there is no justifiable reason for him to assume any primacy of the sense of unchangeability any longer. *There is* ‘the sense of unchangeability’ and that too *appears*. Thus the unchanging ‘(sense of) being’ was, in a wholly gratuitous manner, given priority over the appearance of things by being assumed as something which does not appear. The reason for this was simply because this notion of priority was never *noticed*.²⁹ If a *puthujjana* sees this *existing* notion that *appears*, (which is *that*, which is his ‘self’), a sight of inseparability between ‘existence’ and ‘appearance’ will emerge. If a thing exists, that is because it appears; if it appears, that is because it exists. Neither the appearance nor the existence can be discerned or conceived without each other, and that is what is meant by “to be is to be

perceived”—*esse est percipi*. At this phase, the assumption of a hidden reality *behind* the appearance is almost inconceivable. The *puthujjana* understands that, if anything is to exist, it *has to* appear.³⁰

Thus one's authenticity grows. The attitude has undergone a considerable change, from a *puthujjana* not even being aware of his own existence, to the notion that things appear *because* they exist, and on to the point where 'to appear' and 'to exist' means just the same. Although this is certainly far better than anything before, nevertheless this attitude doesn't quite yet free the *puthujjana* from suffering. He has to continue, but this is as far as he can go on his own. No matter how hard he tries to understand the existence of a thing, any attempt to do so will throw him onto its appearance, and *vice versa*—whenever he looks at the appearance, all he is going to see is the existence. In one way or another, the *puthujjana* will not be able to prevent himself from falling into the view that 'appearance' and 'existence' are the *same*,³¹ or—since the difference is perceived between them—he might think that they are *different*.³² But then the 'sameness' is still there, so perhaps they are *both-the-same-and-different*. Consequently he can negate the whole thing and think that they are *neither-the-same-nor-different*. In either case, he remains *ignorant* in regard to the two; he remains a *puthujjana*. If he is to change this, he needs help from the *outside*; it has to come to him *externally*. The *puthujjana* is not able (i.e. it is structurally impossible) to 'step out' of his experience, and see his situation of 'being-a-*puthujjana*' as a whole. No matter how far he steps back, he carries his ignorance with him. Only coming across the Buddha's Teaching can offer him an *outside perspective* of himself which, if cultivated, can 'turn him' into a non-*puthujjana*.³³

The Teaching tells him that 'existence' cannot be conceived anywhere *apart from* 'appearance', but also that it is *not* 'appearance' as such; even more importantly, it also tells him that 'existence' does not depend on 'appearance' directly, it depends on the 'assumption' (*upādāna*)³⁴ *in regard to* that which appears,³⁵ and this means nothing else than that the appearance, for its appearing, *does not require* existence at all—it is actually better *without it*.³⁶

“Na kho, āvuso visākha, taññeva upādānaṃ te pañcupādānakkhandhā, nāpi aññatra pañcahupādānakkhandhehi upādānaṃ. Yo kho, āvuso visākha, pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu chandarāgo taṃ tattha upādānan”ti.

“The five-assumed-aggregates, friend Visākha, are not just assuming; but neither is there assumption apart from the five-assumed-aggregates. That, friend Visākha, in the five-assumed-aggregates which is desire-&-lust, that assumption is therein.” (MN 44/i,299-300)

Thus this inquiry has passed ‘through’ the *puthujjana*’s ‘being’, which must not be either denied (dismissed) or justified (explained), but established as a *phenomenon*. It was seen that this phenomenon, far from being a reason because of which things appear, actually depends on the *puthujjana*’s *assumption* in regard to *that which appears*. In the beginning the *puthujjana*’s existence was a mere fact, of which he was barely aware, and this fact represented his thoroughly inauthentic self. However, now his existence has not only ‘appeared’ for him, it was seen that ‘existence’ cannot even be conceived *without* that which appears. In this way the roles were slowly reversed and the priority of existence over the appearance of things has faded. Now, with the Buddha’s aid, a *puthujjana* can further see that actually the existence is not that which appears—it never was. It is the appearance that *exists*, by him *assuming* it (or by being *ignorant* in regard to it). The existence, in order to be, requires *maintaining* (hence *upādānapaccāya bhavo*). In this way a new perspective has emerged on the relationship between existence and appearance, which reveals that, initially, the *puthujjana* had the whole picture upside-down. The further pursuit of this principle would simply carry further right through the center of the *puthujjana*’s being (who at that point would cease to be a *puthujjana*) and complete the ‘reversal’ of this inverted experience of his, in the same manner as one would turn a sleeve inside-out. At that point that *individual*’s ‘being’ would cease without remainder.

14. “Husserl attempts to make the natural attitude descriptively evident by pointing out that our everyday way of going about our business—dealing with things of all sorts, other people, engaged in scientific activities, recreation, and so on—involves various modalities of ‘belief’. I simply take for granted that what I am dealing with exists and is, more or less, as it presents itself as being. Furthermore, ‘other actual objects are there for me as determinate, as more or less well known, without being themselves perceived or, indeed, present in any other mode of intuition’ (Husserl 1982:51)—that is, they belong within a co-intended horizon of ‘indeterminate actuality’ (Husserl 1982:52).”— Simon Crowell, ‘Husserlian Phenomenology’ in: *The Blackwell Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, Blackwell, Oxford, 2009, p. 19.
15. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, SCM Press, London, 1962, p. 25.
16. A rather inspired observation of Walter Kaufmann, a distinguished Nietzsche scholar and translator, in his book *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (Meridian Books, New York, 1956) p. 46: “... perhaps the most compassionate and venerable of all mortals, the Buddha... [had said that] all man’s alibis are unacceptable: no gods are responsible for his condition; no original sin; no heredity and no environment; no race, no caste, no father, and no mother; no wrong-headed education, no governess, no teacher; not even an impulse or a disposition, a complex or a childhood trauma. Man is free; but his freedom does not look like the glorious liberty of the Enlightenment; it is no longer the gift of God. Once again, man stands alone in the universe, responsible for his condition, likely to remain in a lowly state, but free to reach above the stars.”
17. “There is fruit and result of good and bad action...,” i.e.: I am *responsible* for what I do. Similarly “there are... recluses and brahmins who have realised for themselves direct knowledge...” means: freedom from suffering is possible, and if I don’t pursue it, I, myself, am responsible for that. By not pursuing it I am responsible for remaining there where suffering can arise—I am responsible for *my suffering*.
18. “It is far better for a man to understand that he does *not* understand the Dhamma, than it is for him to believe falsely that he does understand it. The former attitude may encourage progress; the latter can only obstruct it.”—*CtP*, pp. 199-200.
19. For more on the everyday phenomenon of ‘inauthenticity’ see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, and J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, particularly the chapter on ‘Bad Faith’. See also the following lines from Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1941, p. 311): “Science organizes the moments of subjectivity within a knowledge of them, and this knowledge is assumed to be the highest stage, and all knowledge is an abstraction which annuls existence, a taking of the objects of knowledge out of existence. In existence, however, such a principle does not hold. If thought speaks deprecatingly of the imagination, imagination in its turn speaks deprecatingly of thought; and likewise with the feeling. The task is not to exalt the one at the expense of the other, but to give them an equal status, to unify them in simultaneity; the medium in which they are unified is *existence*.”
20. Ven. Nāṇavīra observes: “There is, however, another point: an *oriented world* (which is the meaning of *loka* in the Suttas) is the correlative of a point of view (there is a Saṃyutta Sutta that specifically identifies the world with the eye, ear, nose, and so on), and consequently to deny self is to deny the world, and to assert self is to assert the world (*so loko so attā*). Thus we have the following scheme:

Sassatavāda

Assert a point of view;

Uccedavāda

Denies a point of view;

Asserts self— <i>atthi attāti</i> ;	Denies self— <i>natthi attāti</i> ;
Asserts the world;	Denies the world;
Denies the <i>objective</i> existence of things— <i>sabbam natthīti</i>	Asserts the objective existence of things— <i>sabbam atthīti</i>
Is an Idealist (Bradley, Berkeley)	Is a Realist (Stebbing, Russell)

If this analysis is correct it would explain why a scientist, though apparently asserting the permanence of the Universe, is, in fact, an *ucchedavādin*—the Universe he asserts is without a point of view, and is the negation of the world (= *loka*).”—*StP*, p. 186.

Also, cf. DN 2, in particular Ajita Kesakambalin’s response.

21. Obviously things can be a bit more complex than this, inasmuch as these opposite views have a lot in common. As Merleau-Ponty observes: “We pass from absolute objectivity to absolute subjectivity, but this second idea is not better than the first and is upheld only against it, which means by it. The affinity between intellectualism and empiricism is thus much less obvious and much more deeply rooted than is commonly thought. It arises not only from the anthropological definition of sensation used equally by both, but from the fact that both persist in the natural or dogmatic attitude, and the survival of sensation in intellectualism is merely a sign of this dogmatism. Intellectualism accepts as completely valid the idea of truth and the idea of being in which the formative work of consciousness culminates and is embodied, and its alleged reflection consists in positing as powers of the subject all that is required to arrive at these ideas. The natural attitude, by throwing me into the world of things, gives me the assurance of apprehending a ‘real’ beyond appearance, the ‘true’ beyond illusion.”—Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, London, 2020) p. 45.
22. “To have faith in the Reality of the ‘external world’, whether rightly or wrongly; to “prove” this Reality for it, whether adequately or inadequately; to *presuppose* it, whether explicitly or not—attempts such as these which have not mastered their own basis with full transparency, presuppose a subject which is proximally *worldless* or unsure of its world, and which must, at bottom, first assure itself of a world. Thus, from the very beginning, Being-in-a-world is disposed to “take things” in some way [Auffassen], to suppose, to be certain, to have faith—a way of behaving which itself is always a founded mode of Being-in-the-world.
The ‘problem of Reality’ in the sense of the question whether an external world is present-at-hand and whether such a world can be proved, turns out to be an impossible one, not because its consequences lead to inextricable impasses, but because the very entity which serves as its theme, is one which, as it were, repudiates any such formulation of the question. Our task is not to prove that an ‘external world’ is present-at-hand or to show how it is present-at-hand, but to point out why Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, has the tendency to bury the ‘external world’ in nullity ‘epistemologically’ before going on to prove it. The reason for this lies in Dasein’s falling and in the way in which the primary understanding of Being has been diverted to Being as presence-at-hand—a diversion which is motivated by that falling itself.”—Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
23. “Behaviour is thus hidden by the reflex, the elaboration and patterning of stimuli, by a longitudinal theory of nervous functioning, which establishes a theoretical correspondence between each element of the situation and an element of the reaction [...] The traditional notion of sensation was not a concept born of reflection, but a late product of thought directed towards objects, the last element in the representation of the world, the furthest removed from its original source, and therefore the most unclear. Inevitably science, in its general effort towards

- objectification, evolved a picture of the human organism as a physical system undergoing stimuli which were themselves identified by their physico-chemical properties, and tried to reconstitute actual perception on this basis, and to close the circle of scientific knowledge by discovering the laws governing the production of knowledge itself, by establishing an objective science of subjectivity...”—Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 12.
24. Things that are not explainable through the observational methods of inductive sciences.
 25. “The theory of sensation, which builds up all knowledge out of determinate qualities, offers us objects purged of all ambiguity, pure and absolute, the ideal rather than the real themes of knowledge.”—Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
 26. A reader might notice here a discrepancy between what has just been said and the views one can find in Heidegger’s or Sartre’s works. These philosophers maintain the notion (in different degrees) of the separation between my being, i.e. the ‘I’, and the being of things, the objects of the experience which ‘I’ encounters. For example Sartre developed a fundamental division of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, which he then tried, and consequently failed, to reconcile in *Being and Nothingness*. The in-itself is not more real than the for-itself, (i.e. ‘me’ or ‘[my] consciousness’), and the reverse is also true; in order for the in-itself to exist it requires the for-itself, as much as the for-itself requires the in-itself. It is not possible, in good faith, to think of or regard the in-itself independently of consciousness, nor consciousness independently of the in-itself, not even in one’s imagination. ‘Matter’, *rūpa*, needs consciousness in order to find its footing in appearance, without it, it is *inconceivable*. (Cf. the mutually dependent relationship between *nāmarūpa* and *viññāṇa*.) In brief: whenever there are things, there is me; whenever there is me, there are things. (That’s the way one has to understand *sabbe dhamma anatta*—all things are not-self.) Whether it is the ‘being’ of things that we are looking at, or my ‘being’, the point is that there is ‘being’—*bhava* is there. This is also why the reader will notice I use ‘existence’ and ‘being’ interchangeably. Whether it is ‘mine’, or not, whether it is personal or impersonal, large or small, visible or invisible, far or near, any ‘being’ whatsoever means that *bhava* is *there*; it is, it exists. As long as that is the case, ‘I’ (or at least some degree of the conceit ‘I am’) will be present.
 27. NoD, ATTĀ.
 28. “... the phenomenon remains, for ‘to appear’ supposes in essence somebody to whom to appear.”—J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes. London: Methuen, 1957, 1969; New York: Philosophical Library, 1957, p. 2.
 29. Hence the nature of it also appearing was obscured.
 30. Sartre (*op. cit.*, p. 6) seems to have become aware of this, but then chose to disagree: “What determines the being of the appearance is the fact that it appears. And since we have restricted reality to the phenomenon, we can say of the phenomenon that it is as it *appears*. Why not push the idea to its limit and say that the being of the appearance is its appearing? This is simply a way of choosing new words to clothe the old “*Esse est percipi*” of Berkeley... It seems that the famous formula of Berkeley cannot satisfy us—for two essential reasons, one concerning the nature of *percipi*, the other that of the *percipere*.” Sartre then goes on to construe consciousness into a form of an ‘empty’ absolute which is “pure ‘appearance’ in the sense that it exists only to the degree to which appears.” (*op. cit.*, p. 12). There is no question of things existing to the degree they appear, however there is no such thing as ‘pure appearance’ in the sense of appearance independent of that which has appeared, since every appearance *has to be* appearance of *something*. Even if someone says: “Pure appearance”—that designation of that “pure appearance” is that which *stands for* that which is “pure appearance,” thus that “pure appearance” is not pure—Sartre’s “empty absolute” is thus a *contradictio in terminis*.
 31. “The first being which we meet in our ontological inquiry is the being of the appearance. Is it itself an appearance?... In other words, is the being which discloses itself to me, which appears to

- me, of the same nature as the being of existents which appear to me?”—Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
32. “... the being of the phenomenon can not be reduced to the phenomenon of being.”—Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
33. “The *puthujjana*’s experience is (*saṅkhāra*)-*dukkha* from top to bottom, and the consequence is that he has no way of knowing *dukkha* for himself; for however much he ‘steps back’ from himself in a reflexive effort he still takes *dukkha* with him...”—CtP, p. 482; and on p. 30 of the same work: “The Dhamma gives the *puthujjana* the *outside* view of *avijjā*, which is inherently unobtainable for him by unaided reflexion (in the *ariyasāvaka* this view has, as it were, ‘taken’ like a graft, and is perpetually available.”
34. *Upādāna* is defined by the PTS Pali-English Dictionary as follows: 1) lit. substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive or going; fuel, supply, provision... 2) ‘drawing upon’, grasping, taking up...; *Assumption, assuming* according to *Chambers Concise Dictionary* means: to adopt, to take in, to take upon oneself, to take for granted; [Latin term is *assūmere, assumptum: (ad) to (sūmere) take*].
- The nature of the assumption in general can be described as follows: the assumption takes its object *for granted*, and it does so without having a knowledge of whether that thing which is being ‘taken up’ *actually* is in the way that it is taken up. As a matter of fact, not having a knowledge of this is the fundamental prerequisite for the assumption to manifest because, if the object is known for what it is, there wouldn’t be a need to *assume* it for what it is. Knowledge and assumption (*vijjā* and *upādāna*) are mutually exclusive. However *upādāna* is there (as *pañc’upādānakkhandā*), which means that the assumption of what the five aggregates are *precedes* that which five aggregates are. In this way the beginningless *avijjā* puts the assumption *first*, as something ‘in front’, something more fundamental than the five aggregates which are taken up. This is done in direct violation of the fact that *upādāna* cannot be anywhere apart from the five aggregates, that it actually requires *them* for its existence. Thus assumption assumes *priority* over that which is *already* there. That ‘assumed assumption’ (or taking for granted that which is taken for granted) becomes the *puthujjana*’s ‘norm’ of things’ existence: it ‘measures’ them according to what it thinks they are, not for what they are. The extent of the assumption determines *the extent of this measure* (i.e. *the existence*)—*upādānapaccāya bhavo*. (Cf. Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 2: “... then the appearance becomes full positivity; its essence is an ‘appearing’ which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it.”)
35. He assumes: it is the same; it is different; it is both-the-same-and-different; it is neither-the-same-nor-different.
36. “Craving, however, is a gratuitous (though beginningless) parasite on the intentional structure described here, and its necessity is not to be deduced from the necessity of intention in all experience. Intention does not imply craving—a hard thing to understand!”—NoD, CETANĀ.

5

Hierarchy of Awareness

The fundamental nature of our experience can be described as a *hierarchy*, which Ven. Nāṇavīra tried to explain in his FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE (NoD). We *are* what we experience, it is not possible to view (or imagine) this hierarchy from ‘outside’, independent of us, because, regardless of how far one steps back, one cannot abandon the experience as such.

The experience, whether mundane or sublime, possesses certain characteristics, and the most prominent among them is that it is *hierarchically ordered*. This hierarchy goes into infinity in both directions, and this is something which can be seen from the nature of *particulars* and *generals*. If we take a look at our own experience as it is, we can see that there are two aspects which appear as being more pronounced than anything else. Those aspects are known as *immediacy* and *reflexion*. Together they comprise this hierarchy of the experience *as a whole*. Thus the hierarchy we have been referring to can be called *reflexive hierarchy*.³⁷ If we want to be more precise we can say that immediacy and reflexion, respectively, represent two different modes of experiencing this hierarchy. In immediacy, reflexion is not directly present; it is there, but placed in the background. In reflexion, the immediate object is seen from an *additional point of view*, which means that once we reflect upon something, immediacy *does not* disappear, it rather becomes secondary to the field of attention but, nevertheless, it remains there:

“In immediate experience the thing is present; in reflexive experience the thing is again present, but as implicit in a more general thing. Thus in reflexion the thing is *twice* present, once immediately and once

reflexively. This is true of reflexion both in the loose sense (as reflection or discursive thinking) and *a fortiori* in the stricter sense (for the reason that reflection involves reflexion, though not *vice versa*). See MANO and also VIÑÑĀNA (d).” (NoD, ATTĀ (a))

The presence of this reflexive hierarchy, as can be seen from FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE³⁸, generates another dimension to the experience. This dimension is also hierarchically ordered, superimposed upon the original reflexive one; dependent upon it, but at the same time responsible for the existence of it. This simply means that their type of dependence is not temporal, i.e. it does not occur in sequence. This new hierarchy is the *hierarchy of awareness* and, although this hierarchy cannot go ‘below’ the experience as such (awareness is always awareness of something in-the-world), there is no limit for ascending levels of this hierarchy. As the term ‘generating’ implies, with the presence of reflexive hierarchy the hierarchy of awareness is also present—*simultaneously*; and as was already said, the existence of this hierarchy makes the reflexion possible in the first place.

Let us try and say something more about the nature of superimposition, which is relevant for these two hierarchies. When things are *superimposed* they are not *directly* or *linearly* related. They are simply *there*, next to each other, and any thought along the lines of *causality* distorts them as they are.³⁹ This superimposed way of existing is nothing else than what is meant by being *akālika*, ‘timeless’ or ‘beyond time’. Two things are there, dependent, yet not directly related to each other. That is the reason why we said that, with the *presence* of reflexive hierarchy, there is the *presence* of the hierarchy of awareness. This precedes any notions of causality or of time. Nevertheless, if we still insist on describing their mutual relationship, the most accurate way would be to simply say: with reflexion, awareness *is*; without reflexion awareness *is not*. This is clearly a reference to *paṭiccasamuppāda* itself, so now would be the right time to say something more about it.

Paṭiccasamuppāda is a principle of timeless dependence, i.e. existential superimposition. With the presence of one thing the other thing is simultaneously present too. Thus it is not possible to conceive or imagine

paṭiccasamuppāda without actually seeing it within the experience, simply because conceiving and imagining, in its nature, *involves sequence* (i.e. it is linear from the point of view of this new hierarchy, and as such pertains solely to the reflexive hierarchy). So, although hierarchy of awareness cannot go ‘under’ or ‘in front’ of the immediate-and-reflexive experience, as we noted above, it can always come ‘closer’ than it is.⁴⁰ The point is that these two hierarchies *do not touch or overlap*, they are *perpendicular*.⁴¹ When we say ‘hierarchy of awareness’, this should not be understood in a sense that one is always aware. On the contrary, revealing this hierarchy requires effort, and is realised through the practice of mindfulness. Nevertheless, this hierarchy *exists*, and because of that the other, reflexive, hierarchy is possible (see above). The difficulty lies in the fact that this hierarchy cannot be *directly* grasped, and that is because any notions of directionality originate from it.

The description made so far refers to the experience as a whole in an *ideal* sense, i.e. the structure of experience has been described and this structure is the same in *arahat* and *puthujjana*. The difficulty is that the experience is, when a *puthujjana* reflects upon it, already affected with ignorance (*avijjā*). Ultimately ignorance is nothing but the *non-seeing* of the nature of superimposition of the two hierarchies. Things are further complicated by the fact that even the reflexive hierarchy is not a simple order of different levels of generality of things; even in this hierarchy, those levels are, in a way, superimposed in relation to each other, and they are all ‘kept together’, so to speak, by the fact that they can all be *attended to* from the perspective of the hierarchy of awareness. This hierarchy unifies them, determines them or ‘keeps them together’. Here we can recognize the nature of determination (*saṅkhāra*) which, as the Suttas tell us, exist through the presence of ignorance (*avijjāpaccayā saṅkhāra*). Thus when one is not free from ignorance, the nature of the hierarchy of awareness is not understood and, because of that, the hierarchy will be implicitly taken *par value*, as a kind of owner-creator of the reflexive one, i.e. of our experience. This hierarchy of awareness appears as being *towards* the reflexive hierarchy, as if ‘pressing’ in the direction of it.⁴² Simply by not-seeing that it is directly dependent upon the reflexive hierarchy, this ‘pressing’ of the hierarchy of awareness is being followed

at its face value, and one comes to *assume and accept* that offered ownership over one's own experience⁴³, i.e. one comes to assume that there actually *is* self.

This is perhaps overly-simplified. As we said earlier on, the reflexive hierarchy generates the presence of the hierarchy of awareness. This in return simultaneously determines the reflexive hierarchy as such. However, since there is no first moment of ignorance being manifested, both of those hierarchies are affected by it, through and through. The hierarchy of awareness appears as somehow 'in between' our reflexive levels of experience, and that is what Ven. Ñāṇavīra meant by saying that both hierarchies are perpendicular (see footnote 2). As a result of the presence of ignorance, this 'owner', which we mentioned above, also appears like something which is *somewhere within* our experience, 'neither here nor there'. This elusiveness is maintained by the lack of one's capability of an indirect approach⁴⁴, and as a result the 'owner' becomes identified with reflexive or immediate, or reflexive-and-immediate, or neither-reflexive-nor-immediate aspects of life. In structural terms, simply not seeing this 'towards' of the hierarchy of awareness, makes the experience distorted, and following it means that one is going 'with the grain'—*anuloma*. Only when 'towards' is *indirectly* seen as being *directly* dependent upon things which are impermanent, will the hierarchy of awareness lose its 'pressure' and remain standing there, "cut off at the root, like a palm stump" (MN 72/i,487). At this point the actual hierarchy is *paṭiloma*, 'against the grain', i.e. 'towards' is seen as impermanent and because of that it ceases to be the *reason of one's actions*, i.e. self is destroyed.

Thus self is the reason for the existence of self, i.e. both reflexion and immediacy are equally affected by it. Only when reflexion-and-immediacy are seen as a whole, as being determined by something else, the nature of the self becomes revealed, which is that *it is not-self* (neither owner nor master). Thus that *thing* which was regarded as self, does not disappear upon realization of *anicca* and *dukkha*, it 'changes direction', so to speak, and becomes not-self, *anattā*. However, even then, the thing remains there and what disappears is self-view⁴⁵, and that is because the hierarchy of

awareness has lost its 'pressure'⁴⁶; thus certain assumptions in regard to the reflexive hierarchy disappear.

* * *

See also: [Questions on 'Hierarchy of Awareness'](#).

37. For more on this subject see *CtP*, L. 93, pp. 351f. It is not possible to clarify the point any further, simply because of the nature of the subject. When one reflects, in a strict sense (i.e. reflexion), one is *aware*. What is then present in one's experience is hierarchy of awareness *together* with those things that are reflected upon, i.e. revealed by reflexion.
38. *NoD*, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, Static Aspect, §16.
39. *Yena yena hi maññanti, tato taṃ hoti aññathā*, "In whatever terms they conceive it, it turns into something other than that." (*Sn* 3.12)
40. This is achieved in the practice of *jhāna*, which, however, will not concern us here.
41. *NoD*, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, Static Aspect, §16.
42. "It is in the nature of the *pañc'upādānakkhandhā* to press for recognition, in one way or another, as 'self'." (*NoD*, PARAMATTHA SACCA, §6)
43. One does not see that the 'owner' depends upon his ownership.
44. By an 'indirect approach' we imply seeing the nature of superimposition. As it was outlined above, the *direct approach* has been taken in this essay as *linear* and, as such, it is incapable of reaching and understanding the hierarchy of awareness in a proper way (see the fifth paragraph). The *indirect approach* refers to seeing that, with the presence of *what*, does *this* arise, and with the absence of *what*, does *this* cease. In other words, this is a phenomenological approach, or an approach founded upon *sati*, whereby the immediate things of experience are *not directly followed* at their initial appearance.
45. View originating from the self.
46. Only an *arahat* is completely free from this pressing nature of experience. The case with other *sekhā* is that 'pressure' varies in degrees.

6

Papañca-saññā-saṅkhā

This compound has represented, to paraphrase John D. Ireland from his *Udāna* translation notes, a stumbling block which even the ancient commentaries find difficult to define. If the importance of the term is to be deduced from the extent of its difficulty then, indeed, understanding this compound carries a lot of significance in regard to grasping the true meaning of the Buddha's Teaching.

There are various translations of *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā*, with currently the most prominent ones being either Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's "notions [born of] mental proliferations" translating the term *papañca* as 'proliferation'; or Ven. Ñāṇamoli Thera's "calculations of perceptions of diversifications" where he renders *papañca* as 'diversification'. Beyond these two, plus the PTS Dictionary definition, I am not familiar in detail with any other different interpretations of this compound. I am aware that Ven. Ñāṇananda in his *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought* addresses this topic to a certain degree and also that Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi based his views of the term upon this interpretation⁴⁷ but I, myself, have never actually read Ven. Ñāṇananda's book, so my view on this matter will perhaps come from, to some extent, a different angle.

To start with, the respective terms 'diversification' and 'proliferation' do not deviate from the meaning of *papañca*. According to the PTS Dictionary, *papañca* is "expansion, diffuseness, manifoldedness" or "obstacle, hindrance or delay". The other members of the compound are defined as *saññā*, 'perception', and *saṅkhā*, 'sign' or 'characteristic'. So the above-mentioned translations would, to some degree, convey the nature of *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā* quite accurately and, as Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi says in

*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*⁴⁸ (endnote no. 229, pp. 1204-5): “no rendering [of this compound] is utterly beyond doubt”. The question which raises itself then is not how to etymologically trace the exact roots and origination of the compound, since such a task in this case proves impossible in the absolute sense (which many seem to agree with). Rather it is better to focus and try to find out, *within* one’s own experience and practise, what is implied existentially and phenomenologically in the Suttas by this term.

At the risk of being incomprehensible on some points, I will try to use ‘descriptive’ language, rather than overly technical terms, as people’s general views are already quite firm in regard to such terminology and it is very likely that they will be coming from a quite different place than me, probably too different, which could obstruct them from understanding what I’m trying to say. In order to reduce this possibility to a minimum, I thought of using more common terms in my descriptions which carry less chance of being misunderstood. I hope I won’t miss the mark too much.

Those familiar with phenomenology and the philosophy of existence should not have any problem in understanding a statement like ‘all our experience is intentional’ or ‘teleological’ or simply—‘significant’. Each thing (*dhamma*) which is being experienced in our everyday life has, as its *inherent nature*, to point to other thing(s), within the experience as a whole. The thing’s significance is not something ‘steady’ or ‘unchangeable’, although it might often appear so. The significance of a thing is, rather, something which is being *acquired* through the *repetition* of the respective experiences of that very thing. During this, the whole perception of a thing comes to ‘grow’ in the course of time, so to speak and, though there are certainly significances which are *recognized* as common to all people, at a more fundamental level they are all *individually* acquired and carried by each of us.⁴⁹

Without going into greater detail, let us say that in the Suttas this intentionality of experience is what is meant by the statement ‘with the grain’ or *anuloma*. Actually it is probably better to be more precise and to re-qualify this and say: taking for granted this intentionality, holding it and appropriating it, makes this *with* of ‘with the grain’ to appear. In the

arahat's case, the ignorance is completely destroyed, yet the grain still remains, i.e. things *do not* stop pointing to other things, but this 'with' ceases to exist and is being replaced by 'against', as a result of which we get 'against the grain'—*paṭiloma*. What has changed is the fundamental *direction* of regarding this very *directionality of experience*. Thus, even in the case of complete liberation, things continue to be teleological or 'with purpose' so they still point to other things and so on. All this is being mentioned because the term *papañca* is probably too often misunderstood to simply mean 'mental proliferation', 'when one thinks or analyzes too much' or something like that. Although these things do imply *papañca* (or to be more precise: ignorance and desire-and-lust), this nevertheless shows us that if *papañca* is anything, it is certainly more fundamental than that. In support of this we may add that *papañca* is frequently linked with *maññanā*, 'conceiving' (for which see MN 1), which certainly represents the most fundamental 'occurrence' in a mind affected with ignorance. Thus what *papañca* would imply is nothing less than this very *intentionality* of our experience and its *tendency* to grow and expand. However this can happen only when that 'with' is present, i.e. when the mind is not free from the bonds of ignorance and when it keeps following things in their appearance—*Idhāvuso, bhikkhuno cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā rūpanimittānusāri viññāṇaṃ hoti rūpanimittassādagadhitāṃ rūpanimittassādaviniḃbandhaṃ rūpanimittassādasamyojanasamyouttaṃ...*, "... his consciousness flows after the sign of form [sound, smell, tastes, touches, thoughts], is tied and shackled by gratification in the sign of form, if fettered by the fetter of gratification..." (MN 138/iii,225). And sure enough, it is said that the *arahat* is *nippapañca*—without diversifications, free from any attachments (*upadhi*), free from burden *accumulated* in the past.

Thus one's world (everything which appears—*nāmarūpa*) expands. One's views, desires etc. expand too, yet this should not be understood in a momentary sense, which would suggest that they will somehow 'shrink' afterwards⁵⁰ by themselves. Their *intensity* or the *intensity of their presence*, once 'accumulated', i.e. came to being, is being 'assumed' or 'held' (*upādāna*) at that (new) face value. When this happens—and it happens through the repetition of [ignorant] actions as described above—consciousness 'becomes established' upon that *degree of presence*, which

then becomes the *actual experience* of that *thing*. Thus the intensity of experience, that which appears as *nāmarūpa* grows (for more details see DN 15/ii,63). This kind of pattern stretches from the most fundamental levels of our existence (as seen in MN 1), up to the coarsest ones which we might say are, *daṇḍādāna-satthādāna-kala-havigga-havivāda-tuvaṃtu-vaṃpe-suñña-musāvādānaṃ*, “resorting to rods and weapons, of quarrels, brawls, disputes, recrimination, malicious words and false speech...” (MN 18/i,110)⁵¹ that are the directly painful actions resulting from one’s ignorance. Thus, based on the above, *papañca* represents the ‘diffusion’ of this fundamental underlying principle, with ignorance being *necessarily present*, and consequently *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā* are all ‘calculations’ or ‘notions’, perceived and originated as a result of taking this principle of diffusion for granted, i.e. not understanding it.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that this whole situation would be much clearer if we can bear in mind Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s description of the infinite hierarchy of consciousness, the different levels of generality of *nāmarūpa-viññāṇa*. That is because *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā* is not something which appears on a voluntary level, as if one could stop it at any time; it originates from the most general (reflexive) levels of existence.⁵² What one is responsible for, in that whole structure, is *abhinanditabbaṃ abhivaditabbaṃ ajjhositabbaṃ*, “delighting in, welcoming and holding to...” *yatonidānaṃ, bhikkhu, purisaṃ papañcasaññāsaṅkhā samudācaranti*, “the source through which perceptions and notions [born of] mental proliferation beset a man...”⁵³ Thus the hierarchy of signifying things continues to arise (cease and change-while-standing), but it no longer grows; it is “cut off at the root, made like a palm stump”. Its root was ignorance in itself and, with its absence, everything founded upon it comes to an end—one is free. In other words, the respective experiences of the *puthujjana* and *arahat* alike share the same fundamental nature of impermanence (arising and ceasing), but the respective *intensities* of those experiences are changed; for the *arahat*, *feeling none* of it⁵⁴ and for the *puthujjana*, dependent on the amount of ignorance being present. With more ignorance, more ‘intensity’, things appear as more ‘pressing’, and one is easily prone to giving in to desire-and-lust. The arising of things in the *puthujjana*’s mind brings diffusion of perceptions and notions which,

while not understood at its roots will, in return, diffuse further and further and so on. This cannot happen in the *arahat*'s mind any more. His consciousness has 'ceased', so there is nothing to follow and diversify upon this teleological characteristic of the existential structure, which will remain only until his aggregates 'break apart'.

47. Which, as I will attempt to show in this essay, is over-simplified.
48. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, 2005.
49. ‘Preferences’ and ‘values’ are perhaps too coarse, yet a good enough example of this.
50. They would only do so in the *arahat*’s case.
51. Translation taken from *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, 2005, p. 202.
52. Compare also the nature of the five hindrances. It takes the first *jhāna* for one to be able to suppress them, which speaks for itself, since such strength of concentration is enough to become an *arahat* (if there is wisdom, of course).
53. *Op. cit.*, p. 202.
54. Compare Ven. Sāriputta’s answer to Udāyin, when the latter asked him what is there that is pleasant when there is nothing felt [in *nibbāna*]*—etad eva khv ettha āvuso sukhaṃ, yad ettha n’atthi vedayitaṃ*, “Just this is pleasant, friend, that herein there is nothing felt” (AN 9:34/iv,414).

7

The Infinity of the Mind

(Notes on AN 1:51)

“Pabhassaramidaṃ, bhikkhave, cittaṃ. Tañca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭham. Taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti. Tasmā ‘assutavato puthujjanassa cittabhāvanā natthī’ti vadāmi”ti.

“Bright, monks, is the mind. It is superimposed by the defiling obstructions. The uninstructed worldling does not know this. For the uninstructed worldling, therefore, there is no development of mind.”
(AN 1:51/i,10)

Pabhassaram—this can be translated as ‘bright’, and it should be regarded as something lit up, shining, effulgent or lucid. To find out how this term should be understood, one can bring to mind the term *ākāsa* (‘space’, which literally means ‘shining forth’, in the sense of a space which is lit up). In MN 49/i,329 we can see that consciousness is referred to as *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato pabhaṃ*, where ‘non-indicative’, ‘infinite’ (or endless, limitless) and ‘completely radiant’ (i.e. utterly and fundamentally lucid, not to be understood in a sense of mystically beaming rays of light or similar), are the terms referring to *viññāṇa*.⁵⁵ The whole point is that ‘brightness’ is an epithet describing the inherently *infinite structure* of the mind, which is ‘defiled’ by the obstructions (i.e. made *finite*). In SN 35:243/iv,186 the Buddha said:

Kathañcāvuso, anavassuto hoti? Idhāvuso, bhikkhu cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā piyarūpe rūpe nādhimuccati, appiyarūpe rūpe na byāpajjati, upaṭṭhitakāyassati ca viharati appamāṇacetaso.

“How, friends, does one not leak? Here, friends, having seen a form with the eye, a monk does not incline towards pleasing forms, he is not affected by displeasing forms. He lives aware of the body there and with a mind that is boundless.”

A monk can dwell and live his life with a “boundless mind.”^{56,57} He has understood the nature of the body *there*, together with the arisen structure of the present experience⁵⁸, which is infinite. By understanding the infinite or boundless, any boundaries and finiteness that were present, as a result of that lack of understanding, are removed. In other words, ‘brightness’ or ‘lucidity’ or ‘infinity’ or ‘boundlessness’ are ways of describing the *property* of the fundamental structure of experience, which is the very reason why overcoming the obstructions is possible.

Āgantuka—here it is translated as ‘superimposed’. It can also mean ‘adventitious’, ‘incidental’, ‘accessory’. The main point that has to be borne in mind is that the ‘obstructions’ are ‘incidental’, in the sense that they are not caused by the *pabhassaramidaṃ cittaṃ*, but are nevertheless there. The defiling obstructions do not have anything in common with the brightness of the mind; they are simply ‘layered’ there, superimposed, without actually affecting the infinite structure. Thus, since the infinite mind does not need those obstructions, it can rightly be said that they are completely gratuitous.⁵⁹

So obstructions, or more precisely *avijjā*, have no *first point* when they are manifested, before which mind was pure, bright and unpolluted. Because of this, it is not correct to refer to ‘bright mind’ as an *original thing*, as if it existed in a pure state *before* the obstructions arrived. Since there is no beginning to the infinity, nor to the beginningless ignorance (*avijjā*), the notions of ‘first this, then that’ have no place to apply. So how shall this evident priority of the ‘bright mind’ be understood then? The answer is simple: in an atemporal, structural sense. The infinity of the mind precedes ignorance ontologically, so to speak, while they are there,

both *simultaneously present*. This should also shed some light on why the structure of the mind does not imply, nor require, the obstructions (hence they are called ‘obstructions’): they are superfluous, unnecessary, superimposed. Yet the defilements (*uppakilesā*) are there, and are not to be found elsewhere.⁶⁰ To put this all in different words: the infinity of one’s mind is atemporally more fundamental than one’s own nescience in regard to it. Furthermore it is because of the ignorance in regard to the *nature of infinity*, that ignorance is a *beginningless phenomenon*. If infinity has no beginning, how could the fundamental ignorance of that be different?

This is not all, there are further implications of one’s ignorance of the infinite structure—namely, *permanence*. The uninstructed worldling confuses the notion of infinity (no beginning, no end) with the notion of *eternity*, or rather *identifies* the two. In this way, a present experience is regarded as eternal or permanent. What a *puthujjana* does not see is that eternity implies infinity, but infinity does not imply eternity.⁶¹ Because of nescience in regard to this, the *puthujjana*’s experience of infinity *assumes* permanence. In other words, his *citta* is regarded as permanent; he regards his self as permanent. If one would be able to see infinity without eternity, or even see it as impermanent, the notion of self, and everything else that depended upon it (which requires the notion of permanence), would cease without remainder. Knowing infinity as something present (i.e. arisen), but impermanent (for the very reason that it has *arisen* on its own accord), clears the mind of any obstructions, any superimposed interferences with the infinite structure. Hence it is said that the *arahat*’s mind is *immeasurable*.⁶² His *citta* has been developed to a structurally more fundamental state, and it is because this state was always *possible* (but not *actual*)⁶³, that transcending the obstructions was feasible. In other words, if one’s mind was *inherently ignorant*—i.e. ignorance structurally preceded any experience—*arahatship* would not be possible. (See footnote 5).⁶⁴

55. Ven. Ñāṇavīra took *sabbatopabhaṃ* to be *sabbato-apahaṃ* (from *apahoti*, *a + pahoti*), in which case this compound would be synonymous with *anidassanaṃ*, ‘non-indicative’ or ‘not-producing’ (Self). (Cf. NoD, A NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA (j)). Whether he was right or wrong in reading it like this, it is clear here that either way the context is scarcely affected—the *infinity* of consciousness does not indicate self, does not produce self, and it is fundamentally lucid, radiant, and unobstructed.
56. Cf. MN 38.
57. This also indicates that the states of ‘boundlessness’, ‘infinity’ and so on that are mentioned in the Suttas are not exclusively reserved for ‘meditation attainments’, as they are commonly regarded.
58. Cf. *ayañceva kāyo bahiddhā ca nāmarūpaṃ*, “there is just this body and name-and-form externally” (SN 12:19/ii,24).
59. “Craving, however, is a gratuitous (though beginningless) parasite on the intentional structure described here, and its necessity is not to be deduced from the necessity of intention in all experience. Intention does *not* imply craving—a hard thing to understand! But if intention did imply craving, *arahatta* would be out of the question, and there would be no escape.” (NoD, *cetanā* (f)).
- In other words, if *citta* was not inherently *independent* of the obstructions, then the liberation from them would not be possible (since they would have been *implied* into that infinite structure).
60. Cf. MN 44.
61. The reader might notice that Ven. Ñāṇavīra in FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE refers to the endurance of a thing as ‘eternal’. This structural ‘eternity’ is what is meant here by ‘infinity’. This is just a matter of how one decides to designate these terms. If we were to choose the term ‘eternal’ to describe the property of the structure, we would additionally have to qualify it by saying: “A thing endures for ever. A thing is eternal... until it ceases.” I, personally, prefer ‘infinite’ so that the distinction between the inherent nature of the arisen experience (infinity) becomes apparent from the *puthujjana*’s appropriation of it (eternity).
62. Cf. AN 3:115 & SN 35:202.
63. Cf. *nibbānadhātu*, ‘extinction element’.
64. For these very reasons the Buddha was able to ‘rediscover’ the path which lay there. For more cf. SN 12:65.

8

Not Perceiving the Feeling

(Notes on MN 43)

Yā cāvuso, vedanā yā ca saññā yañca viññāṇaṃ—ime dhammā saṃsaṭṭhā, no visaṃsaṭṭhā. Na ca labbhā imesaṃ dhammānaṃ vinibbhujitvā vinibbhujitvā nānākaraṇaṃ paññāpetuṃ. Yaṃ hāvuso, vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vijānāti. Tasmā ime dhammā saṃsaṭṭhā no visaṃsaṭṭhā. Na ca labbhā imesaṃ dhammānaṃ vinibbhujitvā vinibbhujitvā nānākaraṇaṃ paññāpetun'ti.

“Friend, feeling and perception and consciousness—these things are associated, not disassociated. It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference [between them]. What one feels, that one perceives. What one perceives, that one cognizes. Therefore, these things are associated not disassociated. It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference [between them].” (MN 43/i,293)

The Teaching is for the one who feels. When one thinks “this is what I feel,” that is what one *thinks*, not what one *feels*. Feeling cannot be thought, it cannot be perceived. What one perceives is one’s perception, what one feels is one’s feeling.⁶⁵ Feeling and perception are simply *there*, superimposed, independent and different in nature.

“What one feels, that one perceives.”

Thinking that it is *the same* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [same] thing as *independent* of that

feeling and perception. That thing is.

Thinking that it is a *different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing is.

Thinking that it is *both-the-same-and-different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [both-the-same-and-different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing is.

Thinking that it is *neither-the-same-nor-different* thing that one feels and *simultaneously* perceives, means one *assumes* that [neither-the-same-nor-different] thing as *independent* of that feeling and perception. That thing is.

Thus, through that assumption, one *identifies* that thing.

Whether one thinks it is the same, or different, or both, or neither, feeling is there, *regardless* of the perception in regard to it. Thus a feeling cannot be thought, it can only be *felt*. A perception cannot be felt, it can only be *perceived*. One has to learn *how to feel*, or how to *know* ‘that because of which’ the feeling is.⁶⁶ This means how to *discern* it from that which perception is. This cannot be done by separating feeling and perception and examining them individually.⁶⁷ So how then can one do it?

By *feeling* [the feeling]. By *perceiving* [the perception]. By *cognizing* [the cognizance].

By *cognizing feeling-while-perceiving*.

By *understanding* cognizing.

By *not-conceiving* perception.

If the superimposition of these two completely independent, simultaneously present, domains is understood, the assumption of an *independent thing*,⁶⁸ outside of feeling and perception, ceases to be ‘a bridge’ for the two. The ‘thing’ which is being *identified* (as the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different), is that ‘bridge’ and feeling and perception ‘meet’ or ‘come together’ because of it. That thing is assumed *to be that* which one *feels* and

perceives.⁶⁹ In this way feeling and perception (and consciousness) also come to be *identified*.⁷⁰ Thus that '[assumption of a] thing' which identifies the *unidentifiable*⁷¹ feeling and perception makes them *manifest in that identity*—feeling and perception come to *exist*. The identity feels, the identity perceives—I feel, I perceive.

One feels pleasure, one feels pain, one feels neither-pleasure-nor-pain.
One perceives blue, one perceives yellow, one perceives red, one
perceives white.⁷²

One can be *aware* of what one feels; one can also be *aware* of what one perceives. *Through understanding that because of which one is aware of*, one knows that feeling and perception *structurally* cannot overlap or merge or be 'bridged' or identified or cross into each other's domains. This makes the *assumption*, in regard to feeling and perception (as the same, different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different),⁷³ *redundant, irrelevant, not worth maintaining*. Why? Because it does not, and it cannot make *any difference* to the *structural order* of things (feeling feels, perception perceives). If it could, the freedom from suffering would not be possible.⁷⁴ Fully understanding that, whichever way one's thought (assumption) goes, feeling cannot be *identified* as the same, (different, both-the-same-and-different, neither-the-same-nor-different) from perception, leaves that feeling and that perception just standing there—*indifferent* to each other.^{75, 76}

Agreeable perception is assumed *to be that* which is pleasantly felt;
Disagreeable perception is assumed *to be that* which is unpleasantly felt;
Neutral perception is assumed *to be that* which is neutrally felt.

Thus one thinks it is *this sight*⁷⁷ (sound, smell, ...thought) *that is felt*. Because of that feeling one sets upon to 'affect' those sights (sounds, smells, ...thoughts), sets upon to change them, modify them, adjust them, pursue them, avoid them; one gets *entangled* in the sights (sounds, smells, ...thoughts) *on account of what* one feels *when they are*. Knowing that feeling

is *just there*, being felt; and perception is *just there*, being perceived, makes further entanglement *impossible*, and any entanglement that was there⁷⁸ is made redundant, disowned, dropped down, never to be picked up again. Why? Because it was structurally impossible to get entangled in the first place but, until one has fully understood that, one's 'not-knowing-that-one-cannot-be-entangled' was *one's entanglement*. When one understands that the arisen things cannot structurally *relate* to each other—feeling feels the feeling, perception perceives the perception⁷⁹—*concern* becomes impossible or *inconceivable*—suffering completely ceases, never to arise again.

65. Cf. NoD, SAÑÑĀ, §2.
66. Or how to not-conceive ‘that because of which’ perception is.
67. Thinking it in isolation from the present experience (i.e. from perception and consciousness) would amount to this. Since the separation cannot actually occur (*not even* in one’s imagination), all one can do is assume *that which is different* between those three.
68. The [sense of] independence is the inevitable outcome of the presence of the assumption in one’s experience. It is therefore not accidental that one’s sense of Self is always regarded as *extra-temporal and changeless*, i.e. *independent* (from the rest of the experience). Cf. NoD, ATTĀ, §1 and L. 147, §3.
69. Thus, because of this assumption, one feels the thing, not one’s feelings; one perceives the thing, not one’s perception. By doing so, one conceives things different to what they are, and when those things change one suffers.
70. Cf. *Determining Determinations* (p. 52). ‘That *because of which*’ [feeling, perception, consciousness are] is assumed as ‘that which’ feeling, perception, consciousness ‘are’.
71. *Na ca labbhā imesaṃ dhammānaṃ vinibbhujitvā vinibbhujitvā nānākaraṇaṃ paññāpetuṃ*
“It is not possible to separate them and by separating them point out the difference...” (MN 43/i,293)
72. Cf. MN 43.
73. All of these are *forms of identity*.
74. Cf. *The Infinity of Mind* (p. 39).
75. By *understanding* this structural ‘indifference’, one *feels indifferent* to the whole structure—which is what equanimity (*upekkhā*) is.
76. It is the nature of the superimposition that breeds this indifference, since *concern* is in its nature always in *relation to something*.
77. Disagreeable (or agreeable, or neutral).
78. In the past, or possibly in the future, or standing there in the present.
79. Matter matters, feeling feels, perception perceives, determinations determine, consciousness cognizes. (Cf. SN 22:79/iii,86-7)

9

Resistance and Designation

(Notes on DN 15)

Nāmarūpapaccayā phasso'ti iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ, tadānanda, imi-nāpetam pariyāyena veditabbaṃ, yathā nāmarūpapaccayā phasso. Ye-hi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimित्तेhi yehi uddesehi nāmakā-yassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu asati api nu kho rūpakāye adhivacanasamphasso paññāyethā ti? No hetam, bhante. Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimित्तेhi yehi uddesehi rūpa-kāyassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho nāmakāye paṭighasamphasso paññāyethā ti? No hetam, bhante. Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimित्तेhi yehi uddesehi nāma-kāyassa ca rūpakāyassa ca paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho adhivacanasamphasso vā paṭighasamphasso vā paññāyethā ti? No hetam, bhante. Yehi, Ānanda, ākārehi yehi liṅgehi yehi nimित्तेhi yehi uddesehi nāma-rūpassa paññatti hoti, tesu ākāresu tesu ākāresu tesu liṅgesu tesu nimittesu tesu uddesesu tesu uddesesu asati, api nu kho phasso paññāyethā ti? No hetam, bhante. Tasmātiḥānanda, ese va hetu etaṃ nidānaṃ esa samudayo esa paccayo phassassa, yadidaṃ nāmarūpaṃ.

“‘With name-&-matter as condition, contact’, so it was said: how it is, Ānanda, that with name-&-matter as condition there is contact should be seen in this manner. Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the name-body is described,—they being absent, would designation-contact be manifest in the matter-body? — No indeed, lord. — Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those

signs, those indications by which the matter-body is described,—they being absent, would resistance-contact be manifest in the name-body? — No indeed, lord. — Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the name-body and the matter-body are described,—they being absent, would either designation-contact or resistance-contact be manifest? — No indeed, lord. — Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which name-&-matter is described,—they being absent, would contact be manifest? — No indeed, lord. — Therefore, Ānanda, just this is the reason, this is the occasion, this is the arising, this is the condition of contact, that is to say name-&-matter.” (DN 15/ii,62)

‘Matter’ is required for ‘name’ to be present. If there would not be that which is ‘named’, ‘name’ would not be able to arise. If on the other hand ‘name’ is absent, ‘matter’ would simply be inconceivable. Thus there is no ‘name’ without ‘matter’, and there is no ‘matter’ without ‘name’, hence—*name-&-matter*. In this way ‘name’ *designates* the resistance, and ‘matter’ *resists* the designation. Without the ‘name’(-body), there would not be any designation manifested in the ‘matter’(-body), but without the ‘matter’(-body), there would not be any resistance manifested in the ‘name’(-body). It is these respective *manifestations* of ‘designation’ and ‘resistance’ that are the *puthujjana*’s problem.

With name-&-matter, he *assumes* that it is *this* ‘matter’ that is *designated*. Through that *assumption*, designation *manifests* in that matter-body.⁸⁰ In this way one’s ‘matter’ is *designated*—one is *contacted*.

With name-&-matter, he *assumes* that it is *this* ‘name’ that is *resisted*. Through that *assumption*, resistance *manifests* in that name-body. In this way one’s ‘name’ is *resisted*—one is *contacted*.

He assumes that it is *this* ‘matter’ that is *designated*.

He assumes it is the *same* ‘matter’ that is designated and is the condition for ‘name’; he assumes it is a *different* ‘matter’ that is designated and is the condition for ‘name’; he assumes it is *both-same-&-different* matter that is designated and is the condition for ‘name’; he assumes it is *neither-same-nor-different* ‘matter’ that is designated and is

the condition for ‘name’; either way, the assumption is *there*. That which resists him he designates as the same, different, both-same-&-different, or neither-same-nor-different, as that because of which ‘name’ is there—the designation *manifests* in this ‘matter’.⁸¹ Thus he designates (*contacts*) his resistance. Contact is there.

He assumes that it is *this* ‘name’ that is resisted.

He assumes it is the *same* ‘name’ that is resisted and is the condition for ‘matter’; he assumes it is a *different* ‘name’ that is resisted and is the condition for ‘matter’; he assumes it is *both-same-&-different* ‘name’ that is resisted and is the condition for ‘matter’; he assumes it is *neither-same-nor-different* ‘name’ that is resisted and is the condition for ‘matter’; either way, the assumption is *there*. That which is designated he resists as the same, different, both-same-&-different, or neither-same-nor-different, as that because of which ‘matter’ is there—the resistance *manifests* in this ‘name’.⁸² Thus he resists (*contacts*) his designation. Contact is there.

Cf. Mūlapariyāya Sutta, MN 1/i,1:

Pathaviṃ pathavito sañjānāti; pathaviṃ pathavito saññatvā pathaviṃ maññati, pathaviyā maññati, pathavito maññati, pathaviṃ meti maññati, pathaviṃ abhinandati. taṃ kissa hetu? ’apariññātaṃ tassā’ti vadāmi.

“From earth, he has a percept of earth; having had from earth a percept, he conceives [that to be] earth, he conceives [that to be] in earth, he conceives [that to be] out of earth, he conceives earth as ‘mine’, he delights in earth. Why is that? He has not fully understood it, I say...”

What a *puthujjana* has to realise is that, regardless of *what* he perceives, it is always his *perception* that is perceived. Whether it is ‘earth’, ‘water’, ‘fire’, ‘air’ or any other thing that MN 1 mentions, all one will ever perceive (*puthujjana* and *arahat* alike) is one’s own perception of that ‘matter’.⁸³ This is saying nothing more than that ‘matter’ is and will *always* be *outside* of one’s reach, outside of that which has appeared.⁸⁴ Perception

is that which is perceived, but perception would not be possible if there is no matter to be perceived; on the other hand matter would be *inconceivable* if perception was indiscernible. If one thinks ‘it is because of the matter, that perception is there’, *that* thought is *perceived*, which means that *that* which is ‘matter’ *in that thought* is also perceived. But since it is only perception that can be perceived, that ‘matter’ which is perceived in that thought cannot be that ‘matter’ which cannot be perceived, since it is perceived. In this way, *from* ‘matter’, a *puthujjana* has a percept of ‘matter’, which he *conceives* to be that *same* ‘matter’ because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *different* ‘matter’ because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *both-same-and-different* ‘matter’ because of which there is a percept of matter. Or he conceives it to be *neither-same-nor-different* ‘matter’ because of which there is a percept of matter. Either way ‘matter’ is *conceived*. He becomes responsible for the *manifestation* of the conceiving of that ‘matter’, he ‘makes’ that ‘matter’ exist.⁸⁵ That ‘creation’ is *his*—thus it is ‘my’ ‘matter’.⁸⁶ But since that ‘my matter’ is conceived as that ‘matter’ *because of which* there is a percept of matter, then that percept[ion] too becomes ‘my perception’.⁸⁷ The same goes for one’s feelings and intentions. They are all conceived as *mine*. Since the *puthujjana*’s whole experience is *his*, he thinks he *himself is*—the view of self exists.⁸⁸

When consciousness does not indicate any ‘me’ or ‘mine’, that ‘matter’ because of which there is a percept of matter, does not manifest itself in that perception (or feeling, or intention)—it does not manifest itself in ‘name’. Thus, in perception there is only perception, i.e. in the seen there is only that which is seen: namely, the seen (and so on for all the senses).⁸⁹ One ceases to ‘perceive matter’; one *knows*⁹⁰ such a thing is impossible or *inconceivable*,⁹¹ one simply *understands*⁹²: *there is* matter, *there is* perception (or feeling, or intention), *there is* (non-indicative) consciousness. One *understands* there are five ‘heaps’.⁹³ Since one understands them, one ceases to *assume* them. With the cessation of assumption, *that* which they were *assumed to be*, ceases—*bhava* comes to an end.

* * *

See also: [Questions on 'Resistance and Designation'](#).

80. *Upādānapaccayā bhavo.*

81. 'Name' assumes existence in 'matter'—'name' exists.

82. 'Matter' finds footing in 'name'—'matter' exists. Cf. DN 11.

83. "It would be as wrong to say 'a feeling is perceived' as it would 'a percept is felt' (which mix up *saññā* and *vedanā*); but it is quite in order to say 'a feeling, a percept, (that is, a felt thing, a perceived thing) is cognized', which simply means that a feeling or a percept is present (as, indeed, they both are in all experience—see *Majjhima* v,3 (M.i,293)). Strictly speaking, then, what is cognized is *nāmarūpa*, whereas what is perceived (or felt) is *saññā* (or *vedanā*), i.e. only *nāma*. This distinction can be shown grammatically. *Vijānāti*, to cognize, is active voice in sense (taking an objective accusative): consciousness cognizes a phenomenon (*nāmarūpa*); consciousness is always consciousness of something. *Sañjānāti*, to perceive, (or *vediyati*, to feel) is middle voice in sense (taking a cognate accusative): perception perceives [a percept] (or feeling feels [a feeling]). Thus we should say 'a blue thing (= a blueness), a painful thing (= a pain), is cognized', but 'blue is perceived' and 'pain is felt'. (In the Suttas generally, due allowance is to be made for the elasticity in the common usage of words. But in certain passages, and also in one's finer thinking, stricter definition may be required.)" (NoD, SAÑÑĀ)

84. Cf. StP, p. 40, §§17-18: "[Four *mahābhutā*]...will always be just below our feet."

85. Thus, 'matter' can never be perceived, but it can "find footing" in that which is perceived (or felt, or intended).

86. He delights in his own creation, because it is his own creation.

87. If one is not to conceive that 'matter' because of which there is a percept of matter, one would not conceive oneself as that because of which there is a perceiver and conceiver of the world. Cf. SN 35:116/iv,95:

Cakkhunā kho, āvuso ... sotena kho, āvuso ... ghānena kho, āvuso ... jivhāya kho, āvuso, ... kāyena kho, āvuso ... manena kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī

"The eye... ear... nose... tongue... body... mind... is that in the world by which one is a perceiver and conceiver of the world."

Also, cf. CtP, p. 440:

"And when shall we 'not be that by which'? ... the Buddha tells us: it is when, for us, in the seen there shall be just the seen, and so with the heard, the sensed, and the cognized. And when in the seen is there just the seen? When the seen is no longer seen as 'mine' (*etaṃ mama*) or as 'I' (*eso'ham asmi*) or as 'my self' (*eso me attā*): in brief, when there is no longer, in connexion with the senses, the conceit 'I am', by which 'I am a conceiver of the world'."

88. This is how the sense of 'mine' leads to the sense of 'self'.

89. Cf. *Bāhiya Sutta*, Ud. 10:8.

90. *Paññā bhāvetabbā*

"Wisdom is to be developed..." (MN 43/i,293)

91. If it were fundamentally subject to one's conceivings, freedom from conceivings would not be possible. Cf. *The Infinity of the Mind* (p. 39).

92. *Viññāṇaṃ pariññeyyaṃ*

"... consciousness is to be understood." (MN 43/i,293)

93. Simultaneous, superimposed, utterly indifferent to each other.

Determining Determinations

Feeling, perception and consciousness are always there together.⁹⁴ It is impossible to have them arising independently and on their own; when there is one, the other two are present as well. They do not pass into each other's domain⁹⁵: one feels one's feeling, one perceives one's perception, one cognizes one's cognizance. Assuming (*upādāna*) that it is the same thing that one feels, perceives and cognizes, or assuming that it is a different thing that one feels, perceives and cognizes, or both-the-same-&-different thing that one feels, perceives and cognizes, or neither-the-same-nor-different thing that one feels, perceives and cognizes, means that *assumed thing is there—it exists*. One *conceives it* (*maññanā*) through one's feeling, one's perception and one's cognizance. One conceives that thing because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, as *that thing* because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there. But since all one can ever feel is one's feeling; all one can ever perceive is one's perception; all one can ever cognize is one's cognizance—*that thing* which is conceived as *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there, will *have to be* either a *feeling*, a *perception* or a *cognizance* and, as such, *cannot be that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there.⁹⁶ By conceiving a feeling, or a perception, or a cognizance as *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there, one *assumes* that feeling, or perception, or cognizance, *existing independently* of feeling, perception and cognizance, as *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there. Thus *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance are there, *manifests in that* feeling, perception or cognizance which are assumed to be *that because of which*

feeling, perception and cognizance are there. Thus *that because of which* feeling, perception and cognizance *are* there, manifests in that being—it *exists*.

That because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, is that which is *a necessary condition* for feeling, perception and cognizance that are there because, *without it*, that feeling, perception and cognizance would *not be there*. As a necessary condition, that because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there, is thus *that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined*. But since through the assumption, *that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined*, manifests as feeling, perception, or cognizance *because of which* that feeling, perception and cognizance are there, *that feeling, perception and cognizance are determined as that by which* feeling, perception and cognizance *are determined*.⁹⁷ Thus, through *not knowing* that one can only feel one's feelings, perceive one's perception, cognize one's cognizance,⁹⁸ one *determines that by which* one's feeling, perception and cognizance are *determined*, as a feeling, a perception or a cognizance. Through that lack of knowledge, determinations are manifested—*avijjāpaccayā saṅkāra*, with ignorance as condition, determinations.

One determines one's determinations through assuming that because of which determinations are there.

But that because of which determinations are there cannot be that which is determined by those determinations, since all one can determine are one's determinations, not *that because of which* those determinations are there.

Since determinations cannot determine that because of which determinations are there, that because of which determinations are there is that which is non-determinable—it is *undetermined*.

If that because of which the determinations are there was to be determined, then the escape from determinations would not be possible.⁹⁹

One can know that that because of which determinations are there cannot be determined.

Without knowing *that knowing*, one's knowledge of that because of which determinations are there, *determines* that because of which

determinations are there, *as that* because of which determinations are there.¹⁰⁰

Since that because of which determinations are there *cannot fundamentally be determined*, one's knowledge that *determines* that because of which determinations are there, *leads to* 'assuming' that because of which determinations are there *as that* because of which determinations are there.

And since that assumption is then *there, that* which is determined as *that because of which* determinations are there, is *there too, as that assumed determination* because of which determinations are there—it is *manifested*, it exists.

One can know that that because of which determinations are there cannot be determined.

By knowing *that knowing*,¹⁰¹ one's knowledge of that because of which determinations are there, *does not determine* that because of which determinations are there,¹⁰² *as that* because of which determinations are there.

Since that because of which determinations are there *cannot fundamentally be determined*,¹⁰³ one's knowledge that *does not determine* that because of which determinations are there *does not lead to* 'assuming' that because of which determinations are there *as that* because of which determinations are there.

And since that assumption is then *not there*, that which is determined as that because of which determinations are there, is *not there either, as that assumed determination* because of which determinations are there—it is *not manifested*, it does not exist.¹⁰⁴

94. Cf. MN 43.

95. Cf. *Not Perceiving the Feeling*, note 9, p. 45.

96. Now is probably the time to mention that *none* of this, nor the paragraphs to follow, can be grasped *intellectually* by the reader. Things that are described here are not to be made sense of in a rationally or philosophically satisfying way, but to be seen *in a certain order* as they arise in one's experience. Hence the deliberate repetitive style which aligns things in the order they are to be understood (which is also the reason why the Suttas are in that form). Also, refraining from a too particular and established terminology was intentional, since that would most likely lead a reader to assume that he already knows what those terms refer to.

97. Cf. SN 22:7.

98. And not *that* because of which feeling, perception and cognizance are there.

99. "Atthi, bhikkhave, ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ. No cetāṃ, bhikkhave, abhaviṣṣa ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ, nayidha jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyetha. Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, atthi ajātaṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asaṅkhataṃ, tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa saṅkhatassa nissaraṇaṃ paññāyati"ti.

"There is, monks, (a) non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined. If, monks, there were not that non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined, an escape from (the) born, become, made, determined would not be discernible. But, because there is (a) non-born, non-become, non-made, non-determined escape from (the) born, become, made, determined is discernible." (Ud 8:3)

Cf. *The Infinity of the Mind*. Because the structure of the experience cannot fundamentally be appropriated, freedom from the appropriation is possible.

100. Nibbānaṃ nibbānato sañjānāti; nibbānaṃ nibbānato saññatvā nibbānaṃ maññati, nibbānasmim maññati, nibbānato maññati, nibbānaṃ meti maññati, nibbānaṃ abhinandati. Taṃ kissa hetu? 'Apariññātaṃ tassā'ti vadāmi.

"From nibbāna, he has a percept of nibbāna; having known nibbāna from nibbāna, he conceives nibbāna, he conceives in nibbāna, he conceives out of nibbāna, he conceives 'my' nibbāna, he delights in nibbāna. Why is that? He has not fully understood it, I say." (MN 1/i,4)

Also cf. MN 102/ii,237.

101. One knows that whether one intends toward, away, both or neither, in regard to that because of which intentions are there, that because of which intentions are there *remains there*, regardless of the intention in regard to it. By understanding that it is fundamentally *inaccessible* to one's intentions, one ceases to crave towards it with those intentions, one ceases to assume it *through* those intentions, since neither intentions nor that which directly stands upon them, namely, one's assumption, could access it. And one knows *that*. ('Ignorant intentions' are simply *craving*, which leads to 'assumption'—*taṇhapaccayā upādāna*, with craving as condition, holding. Cf. NoD, CETANĀ (f): "Intention does not imply craving—a hard thing to understand!").

102. Does not 'stand for it' in one's experience, does not 'represent it', does not 'manifest it'.

103. Cannot be 'accessed' by it.

104. The assumption is made *redundant*.

If one thinks 'there is that because of which intentions are there, which is inaccessible to those intentions', *that thought* 'stands for' that because of which intentions are there, and through that thought one *assumes access* to the inaccessible—therefore it *exists*. If one knows that, regardless of what a thought or intention stands for, it can never 'step outside' of its nature—one can only think one's thoughts (perception perceived) or intend one's intentions, not that because of which that thought/intention are there—one ceases to *assume that* which that intention *stands for*, because of which intention is there. Thus intention remains, while 'attempts to access' fade

away, since one sees them as pointless and loses interest in them. When those 'attempts' are thoroughly subdued, 'the assumption' of that which was assumed '*accessible*' (through those very attempts) disappears too, never to return.

The only reason why assumption can be made redundant is because it was redundant in the first place. Not knowing that it was redundant, makes it necessary, until it ceases to be so. The reason why assumption presents itself as necessary is because it assumes that which is necessary in one's experience: namely, the five-aggregates.

Thus the five-aggregates, which are necessary in one's experience, come to exist, through the assuming of them as that which is necessary in one's experience. But since they are necessary in one's experience, assuming them as necessary in one's experience is not necessary. But until one knows that, that assumption will exist.

II

Correspondence with Mathias

2009

After reading certain Suttas, for example SN 35:74-75, in which people/monks attain stream-entry or even *arahatship* after a short dialogue with the Buddha, I have to admit that no such thing happens to me, even though that dialogue is in front of my eyes and written in plain German/English. Let me give you an example. The Buddha asks: “What do you think, monk: Is the eye constant or inconstant?” And the monk answers: “Inconstant, lord.” Stop! Of course I also *think* that the eye is inconstant, but I don’t *see* it. I cannot eliminate with certainty the possibility of a constant eye. Maybe *this* eye is inconstant, but what about other eyes? How do you know that all (possible) eyes are inconstant without exception? To be honest, I don’t even know for sure that I will die some day. I see others die, but maybe I am the only exception? So it is more than obvious that I don’t see *anicca*. My question is: How? How? How? How to see that “whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing”? I have read the Suttas, the writings of Ven. Ñāṇavīra Thera, Ven. Bodhesako and many others. I’m not new to Buddhism. I uphold the precepts, try to be mindful (in the sense of *satipaṭṭhāna*), try to figure out the meaning of the teachings, but nothing happens. After years of earnest search I’m sick and tired of waiting for some miracle. I *believe* that the Buddha is right, I *trust* him, but I want to *know*. But how? What exactly did the monk do to arrive at the conclusion: “Inconstant, lord”? I have the feeling that my practice leads me nowhere. According to the Suttas, stream-entry does not require a homeless life, celibacy or sitting for hours in meditation every day, so what’s wrong with me? What’s wrong with all those *earnest* people who follow the teachings for years or even decades and are still *puthujjanas*? Something *has* to be wrong, otherwise they should also be able to know/say “Inconstant, lord.” after reading questions like “What do you think, monk: Is the eye constant or inconstant?” What hinders me to see? Bad *kamma*? Or just fear to face the truth? I don’t know. But one thing I know for sure: I want certainty in this life. If this is not possible I don’t want it at all.

Dear Mathias,

The dialogue in itself cannot bring the realization of the right view, and I am sure you are aware of that. We all go around carrying a great deal of “preconceived notions,” as Ven. Ñāṇavīra would often say, about our own experience and because of that, even if we come to hear the right words, we cannot grasp the full meaning of them until we are rid from any accumulated ideas and views. Some person can spend a lifetime listening to the Buddha or reading his teachings and still not obtain even the initial knowledge of the path, yet someone else can just hear one sentence and that would be enough. Considering the fact that it is 2500 years since the Buddha has passed away, which means that the core of his teaching has become even more obscure than ever before, one should come to terms with the idea that obtaining the right view will be extremely difficult and will require a tremendous amount of effort and giving-up. This doesn’t mean that it is impossible, on the contrary, but what one should accept is the fact that, although the amount of effort which is necessary varies from person to person, in the present time it is most likely that it will be vast, i.e. that one will have to keep applying oneself for a long time until the results are reached.

“How do you know that all (possible) eyes are inconstant without exception?” Well, in terms of practical advice, try seeing what ‘this’ eye has in common with ‘that’ eye, what ‘this’ form has in common with ‘that’ form, etc. You will see that *any* eye (or form), whether this or that, is *an* eye. Thus, you don’t have to go and examine each eye individually, seeing the *nature of every eye* (form...) is what is required. Everything is *a thing*. Whether you experience something internally, externally, or both internally and externally, what you experience is *a thing* (*dhamma*) as such. Whether you perceive things with your senses, or mind, again you perceive—things. In most general terms, whatever is an object of your experience is *a thing*, and even further we can say that even the experience as such is also a thing. This might or might not make much sense to you, but what is important is to make an effort and learn how to see it directly, rather than conceptualizing it and then deciding whether to agree with it or not. Cultivating seeing of this general nature of things

is nothing else then practising the Dhamma. Once you establish yourself in viewing your experience phenomenologically, which is basically nothing but establishing yourself in attitudes of mindfulness-and-awareness, the Buddha's words and the descriptions will gradually start to apply to your experience, and then you will come to *see* what was *meant* by 'eye', by 'inconstant' and so on.

Try by purifying your precepts as much as you can ("seeing the danger in the slightest fault"), practising *samādhi*, and constantly pondering on the meanings of the Suttas and Ñāṇavīra Thera's writings. Seeing that "whatever has the nature of arising, has the nature of ceasing," means seeing that whatever appears does so *through being determined*. By seeing this, you automatically *experience* a thing as impermanent, i.e. you don't have to think about it and chase the loose ends of your ideas you have developed before (no matter how useful they might have been).

Indeed it is wrong to expect any kind of miracle to happen, but it is also wrong to blame yourself for that. As a *puthujjana* you cannot help but to keep expecting *something to happen*, and there will be nothing wrong in this—as long as you keep striving. The person who gives up because of the lack of miracles and 'visible' proofs of practice progressing is blameworthy. Here is an extract from one essay I wrote sometime ago (it's unfinished) which addresses this very issue:

"Thus, it is the repeated seeing of the things outlined above, repeated as many times as necessary for ignorance to disappear completely. This should make it fairly clear that the awakening does not 'happen' suddenly or instantly, as it is commonly (and conveniently) supposed. People, when undertaking practice of this Teaching, expect that if they are 'lucky', the pieces (the Teaching and one's experience) will eventually fit in a 'click', so to speak, and on their own accord. So they set to try 'fitting' them properly, in a hope of that click happening, but it seems that it never does. Even if the 'pieces' are placed together 'tightly' they do not seem to stay like that, sooner or later they drift apart. However, if one is persistent in one's efforts, one will continue those attempts of 'fitting them' regardless of the apparent lack of result. And if those attempts are *repeated* a sufficient number of times the pieces will drift apart slower and slower and also less frequently until eventually they will *remain together*. But even then, they *will not* 'click', and that is simply because such a thing

is not possible, i.e. the earlier idea of them ‘clicking’ in some sort of a perfect match was a direct product of one’s unreduced amount of ignorance. So, needless to say, when one reaches the point of pieces not drifting apart so easily, one *ceases to expect* them to click, because by then it will be clearly seen that effort that goes into ‘fitting’ them is what matters and when this is fully developed the possibility of *conceiving* them apart will cease to exist.”

You go further in saying: “Something *has* to be wrong...” Perhaps it does, but perhaps you also expect that “something” to be a sort of a thing which is palpable and clear, so you can easily throw it away or destroy it. Remember what Ven. Ñāṇavīra said, the *avijjā* has to be unscrewed, it cannot be pulled out.

“But one thing I know for sure: I want certainty in this life. If this is not possible I don’t want it at all.” This is perfectly alright, the Dhamma *has to* take priority of one’s life, that is, if one wants to gain any real understanding. Life has to be let go of, otherwise it is not possible to obtain the ‘bigger picture’. With this kind of attitude you will be able to push yourself as far as necessary and hopefully get the results you want, but then, you will also have to take the full responsibility for all of the risks involved and any undesirable outcomes which might happen in that process. No one can guarantee you success, but then, if you have truly seen the pitiful nature of all of one’s desires and actions, you would agree that there is not much to lose after all.

[M. 2]

1 April 2009

Thank-you very much for this reply. It was helpful, especially the part about what it means to see “whatever has the nature of arising, has the nature of ceasing” and that awakening is not a “click.” I’m waiting too much for a sudden happening that will change everything. But when I look back I have to admit that no ‘clicks’ were involved in my progress so far (unless intellectually). Over the years something changed for the better, but I have *to look back* to really see the difference.

The biggest problem in my case seems to be the (regular) practice of *samādhi*. It is just too easy not to do it. Holding the precepts and

pondering on the meanings of the teachings involves some sense of achievement and enjoyment for me. But to sit down and watch the breath (for example) is always about overcoming the resistance to do it.

Can you please explain what you mean by “undesirable outcomes”?

Is it correct to say that seeing *anicca* is not so much about seeing the actual arising and ceasing of things but rather about seeing the underlying principle of that arising and ceasing, i.e. *paṭiccasamuppāda*? In other words: To understand that the eye is *anicca* does not mean that I have to lose my eyes first or that I have to see some kind of coming and going below the threshold of my normal perception, right? I ask like that because in many Suttas the connection between *anicca* and *paṭiccasamuppāda* is not very clear to me. For example: If the Buddha asks someone whether X, Y or Z is *anicca*, I always thought that this question is about the seeing of an actual arising and ceasing in the course of time. But it seems that I was wrong.

[N. 2]

date unknown

Thank you for the replies. I am glad that you were able to make something of my post.

Well, if you are going through the strong resistance towards *ānāpānasati*, try meditating in a different way. Decide to sit for a certain amount of time, and then simply observe your thoughts for example, instead of breath. Or, you can even intentionally ponder on some things related to developing understanding, but do it *while you are sitting*. There are various ways of steadying your mind and experience and, although *ānāpānasati* is the foremost among them, it also requires a lot of effort and persistence to properly develop, i.e. it is not easy. Here is one very useful quote from Ajahn Chah,¹ referring to his way of practising meditation:

“You’re sitting and suddenly the thought of someone pops into your head—that’s *vitakka*, the initial thought. Then you take that idea of the person and start thinking about them in detail. *Vitakka* is picking it up, *vicāra* is investigating it. For example, we pick up the idea of death and then we start considering it: ‘I will die, others will die, every living being will die; when they die where will they go?’ Then stop! Stop and bring it

back again. When it gets running like that, stop it again.....sometimes the discursive thought will wander off and not come back, so you have to stop it. Keep at it until the mind is bright and clear... ..It's when the mind is tranquil. It's *not ordinary mental proliferation*. You sit with a calm mind and then the initial thought comes. For example, I think of my brother who just passed away. Or I might think of some other relatives. This is when the mind is tranquil—the tranquillity isn't something certain, but for the moment the mind is tranquil. After this initial thought comes then I go into discursive thought. If it's a line of thinking that is skilful and wholesome, it leads to ease of mind and happiness, and there is rapture with its attendant experiences. This rapture came from the initial and discursive thinking that took place in a state of calmness. We don't have to give it names such as first jhāna, second jhāna and so forth. We just call it tranquillity.”² (*italics are mine*)

You can see from this that Ajahn Chah was actually *thinking*. Not in an ordinary, oblivious way; it was more like a mindful thinking which, although not controlled, was nevertheless closely observed, in case lust and aversion would appear and decide to take over. When they do appear (and they will), and the mind drifts away, he would bring it back and start again. So the goal was (or is) not to follow the thoughts, nor to resist them, but to *maintain them* in a skilful state, as much as possible. This kind of practice can enable you to eventually see the difference between thoughts and experience which are affected with lust, aversion and delusion and those which are free from them. Once you are established in this, you can also, if you like, start thinking about your *present experience of breathing*—and you will start developing *ānāpānasati* right there.

By “undesirable outcomes” I meant anything which can happen when one pushes oneself too far, like madness, suicide etc. It was the case in the Buddha's time and it is the case now, simply because that “abyss of his own personal existence” which Ven. Ñāṇavīra was referring to in his ‘Preface’, is the most dreadful thing a man can look at, and if he is not prepared for it (by possessing some initial *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*), the consequences can be serious. For example see what happened to Sister Vajirā.³ She managed to gain the right view in that process, but as I said,

no one can guarantee you that. Again to quote Ajahn Chah, who was referring to this kind of experience in one of his teachings:

“Everything I’ve been relating to you concerns the mind following the way of nature. This was no theoretical description of the mind or psychological states. There’s no need for that. When there’s faith or confidence you get in there and really do it. Not just playing around, you put your life on the line. And when your practice reaches the stages that I’ve been describing, afterwards the whole world is turned upside down. Your understanding of reality is completely different. Your view is utterly transformed. If someone saw you at that moment, they might think you were insane. If this experience happened to someone *who didn’t have a thorough grip on themselves*, they might actually go crazy, because nothing is the same as it was before. The people of the world appear differently than they used to. But you’re the only one who sees this. Absolutely everything changes. Your thoughts are transmuted: other people now think in one way, while you think in the another.”⁴ (*italics are mine*)

In your second letter you say: “Is it correct to say that seeing *anicca* is not so much about seeing the actual arising and ceasing of things but rather about seeing the underlying principle of that arising and ceasing, i.e. *paṭiccasamuppāda*?”

I am not sure what exactly you mean by “the actual arising and ceasing,” but anyway, let me assume we mean the same, and in that case the answer would be—yes. Seeing the impermanence of things, in the right way, is only possible through seeing the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. One does not have to closely observe a thing at its beginning and then follow it through to the end in order to see that it is impermanent; just *understanding that because the thing has appeared, and has to cease*, is enough. Only from that place can you see the thing as an “invariant under transformation” and, as a result, also see its arising and ceasing. So indeed, you don’t have to witness the destruction of a thing (an eye for example), to experience the impermanence. It is the impermanence of a *phenomenon*, i.e. *dhamma*, that is referred to in connection to *anicca*, and

because of that you don't have to, as I already said, follow the thing externally until it disappears.

I hope this answers your questions. Feel free to let me know if there are any further points that you would like clarified.

[M. 3]

2 April 2009

You wrote: "By 'undesirable outcomes' I meant anything which can happen when one pushes oneself too far, like madness, suicide etc." I am not sure whether I already pushed myself (or was pushed) too far in the past or not. In my childhood I had some very traumatizing experiences associated with narcosis, i.e. loss of consciousness. I subsequently developed an anxiety disorder. My strongest fear revolves around the annihilation of consciousness, because there is no (sense of) 'self' without consciousness. But at the same time this very fear is like a pointer to me, because it shows very clearly where the central problem of existence is located. I was involuntarily pushed into the heart of *dukkha* many times, so to speak. I know the "abyss of my own personal existence" very well. And I was totally unprepared to face it. In a sense it already made me mad. For years I was on the verge of committing suicide, because I was confronted again and again with a problem I could not solve.

Apart from a very early interest in spirituality, especially Buddhism, there really is a *need* for awakening and liberation in me. There is no real choice. I want to escape death and fear once and for all. If Buddhism wouldn't already exist, one would have to invent it.

Regarding meditation I see a risk of being confronted again with my fear of this abyss, but doing nothing won't solve the problem, right? I try to be very cautious. As a result of my practice of *dāna* and *sīla*, when I think about what I've done, I sometimes feel light and happy inwardly and just want to rest in that warm feeling. It seems that such happiness has to be firmly established before confronting oneself with that "abyss of one's own personal existence." I don't want to force myself too early into a serious meditation practice, but at the same time I don't want to waste my time. It's a balancing act in my situation.

Your advice to observe my thoughts instead of the breath and to maintain them in a skilful state seems a good and promising thing to do. I will try that.

You wrote: “For example see what happened to Sister Vajirā. She managed to gain the right view in that process, but as I said, no one can guarantee you that.” According to Hellmuth Hecker, Sister Vajirā even suffered from hallucinations. Some time ago I was stupid enough to do some experiments with EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomena) and ‘ghost photography’—alone and unprepared. I got immediate results (verified by other people), but after some months I slowly began to hear voices and to see faces and shapes without the help of technical equipment. I eventually stopped the experiments, but it was too late. Since then I have those ‘hallucinations’. Annoying voices, ugly faces, sexual harassment, especially at night. I have learned to live with them, but it’s not easy. Probably they are real ghosts, but I’m not absolutely sure.

I think many people would ask me not to meditate at all. But I think if I follow the Buddha’s path in the correct order, things will change for the better in the long run.

I hope this was not too much personal stuff.

[M. 4]

3 April 2009

I was still unknowingly influenced by the thought that there is some kind of ‘hidden’ destruction (‘from moment to moment’ or something like that) to discover.

It seems I only understand the ‘invariant part’. If something exists at all, it must have a certain duration (as this thing). And according to my understanding duration also involves some kind of ‘passing by’ or a constant shortening of ‘life span’. But why the life span of a certain thing (that has appeared) *necessarily* is limited, I don’t understand yet.

The fact that for a long time you were on the verge of suicide means that you were and are aware of the problem of existence; and the fact that you didn't commit it, means that you possess some wisdom, whether you are aware of it or not. People usually find it too difficult to resist the notion that suicide will solve everything, once things get really bad. Fortunately, thanks to the Buddha's teaching, we all know that it won't solve anything, and as a matter of fact it can make it significantly worse.

I understand what you mean. If you are already on the verge of an abyss, you don't have to push yourself in it. Keep developing and strengthening the precepts and when you feel stronger or more confident then continue carefully applying yourself; but, whatever you do, *do not deceive* yourself about it. By this I mean that you make sure you don't fall prey to justifications and reasons which your mind *will* begin to offer. It is of crucial importance to maintain the self-transparency and *not to ignore* the fact that there is still work to be done (whether you are doing it or not is a different matter).

In terms of meditation, again, take it one step at a time, but also use it to develop self-discipline and restraint, which will eventually enable you not to give in to emotional states that arise.

That the ghosts exist, there is really no question about it. In the Suttas they are mentioned one too many times and we are even encouraged to dedicate offerings to them from time to time. I, myself, have listened to some brief EVP recordings. Whether they are the actual voices of the deceased or not, I cannot tell, and I don't think that anyone will be able to 'prove' it, in terms of scientific evidence. But from the description of my own *individual* experience, I can tell that it certainly had an impact on me, in simply revealing the *utter gratuitousness* of my own life as I know it. All of the views, ideas of what we are, were or going to be, everything which we blindly pick up in the course of this existence is challenged by witnessing something unfamiliar and frightening. When that happens we experience the *ultimate lack of control*. This of course wouldn't be possible if we don't lack that control in the first place, but this is something which people don't really see. Even if those EVP sounds were the actual ghosts, or even if they were not, in the end it doesn't make much difference,

because simply the fact that *there might be ghosts* or anything beyond our ‘normal’ sphere of experience, is *enough* (for some people) to experience that very lack of control over *one’s own being*. Without the presence of wisdom, this can be very terrifying indeed. All of those ‘paranormal’ experiences are paranormal only compared to the level of ‘normal’ experiences, which are those taken for granted. Once you learn how to let go of them, then both, normal and paranormal, are seen for what they actually are, namely—the *experience*. Subtle or gross, far or near, normal or paranormal, any experience is still the experience. And none of the individual experience goes beyond the five aggregates as such, no matter how unfamiliar it might be. This is very important to understand, because of that very fact *the understanding is possible*; by comprehending the five aggregates, one comprehends everything ‘made’ of them, so to speak.

So, relating to your individual case, I wouldn’t doubt that those are the actual ghosts, nor would I be too sure that they are. It is not important. What is important is that there is an experience of *thing(s)* which might or might not be the ghosts (‘real’ or ‘unreal’), but nevertheless, there is the experience *as such*.

Practice loving-kindness and make offerings, cultivate wisdom and *samādhi*, and above all be patient, and then you might even see how much of ‘paranormal’ was created by your own mind really, overwhelmed by Māra; and how much of ‘normal’ was actually coming from the spheres ‘beyond’. Ultimately, what you will see is that, until we are completely free from ignorance, we are all utterly responsible for the subtlest views which define our most immediate experiences; and until we rid ourselves from that *avijjā*, the suffering will be able to arise in *countless numbers* of ways.

I hope I was able to make sense in this reply. Let me know if there is anything requiring further clarification.

You wrote: “In the Suttas they are mentioned one too many times and we are even encouraged to dedicate offerings for them from time to time.” I did this three times so far, but I’m not sure of the effects. Once I thought about to whom I should dedicate offerings and immediately the name of an aunt of mine appeared in my head. I hardly ever knew her, but I knew of her death. She died in her middle-age from the consequences of alcohol abuse. Maybe she wanted to give me a sign, because as far as I know I’m the only one in the family who does such things. I’m not sure if I did it right. I donated some money and wished that she may get the merit. Another time I did the same, but wished for the ghosts which trouble me (provided that those voices etc. are not just hallucinations). But they just laughed at me. The last time I dedicated the merit to all my dead relatives. I donated money to a monastery via bank transfer. But in the Suttas the people offer food or clothing directly to the Buddha or his monk or nun disciples. So I’m not sure about the effects of offering money via bank transfer. I heard different opinions about that.

It often ‘feels’ as if experience is all there is, with nothing behind. I had this ‘feeling’ already as a child. It’s frightening in some way. It is like lucid dreaming: you realize that you are dreaming but you don’t wake up. But to wake up is the only appropriate thing to do in such a situation. Later I understood that the ‘I’ is an experience too and not the experiencer. There is no experiencer, but it *seems* like that. At the first glance it seems as if there is a ‘me’ experiencing a ‘world’. But if I look closer, there is only the field of consciousness or rather the field of existing things, and one of those ‘things’ is the felt ‘I’. Because of this felt ‘I’ the field of existing things (everything else) seems to be ‘*in front of*’ that ‘I’ or ‘me’ or the ‘experiencer’. This subject or experiencer can only be felt, but is not there in terms of sight, sound, smell etc., but it can *merge* with other parts of the experience, like the body for example. It is absolutely clear to me that this I-part of experience has to be removed in order to overcome *dukkha*. And after that only the field of existing things will remain, the presence of phenomena. But ‘I’ don’t want to be ‘removed’. In some way it seems that my fear is the death agony of that ‘I’. It’s like a revolt against those insights. But I can’t go back and pretend not to ‘know’. I feel that I have to

bring it to an end, but I hesitate to do so. It's like refusing to wake up after realizing that one is dreaming. I feel as if the ground falls out from underneath my feet.

[N. 4]

6 April 2009

Your last letter doesn't raise any particular questions, but I would like to mention one thing. You say: "It is absolutely clear to me that this I-part of experience has to be removed in order to overcome *dukkha*. And after that only the field of existing things will remain, the presence of phenomena."

This is true only in a certain sense, and we must be very careful to distinguish it. 'I-part' of experience, as you called it, is *not to be removed in itself*. Trying to do so is a form of denying the actual experience that stands in front of our eyes (cf. Sister Vajirā's remarks after she attained stream-entry, when she said that she was passionately engaged in denying things, while at the same time trying to understand them). Instead of 'forcefully' trying to remove the 'I' from the experience, which will only strengthen it, you rather have to find a way how to *regard it*. In other words, you will have to understand the way to *see that 'I' as 'not-I'*. The very first step of this is allowing that 'I' *to be* as it is, i.e. to see it as a *phenomenon*. Only then will you have potential grounds for understanding that that 'I' phenomenon *directly depends* upon things which are not-I, and then, by default, that 'I' will cease to be 'I', the master-creator of the experience. What is left then is the experience which the Buddha described as *anattā*.

This explanation above might already be clear to you, from Ven. Ñāṇavīra's writings, but I thought there won't be any harm in repeating.

[M. 6]

7 April 2009

I think I understand what you pointed out. It might well be that there are some similarities between Sister Vajirā's views before her stream-entry and my views, because I'm also influenced by the writings of Paul Debes, Hellmuth Hecker, Fritz Schäfer, etc. But their views seem to collide in some way with the writings of Ven. Ñāṇavīra.

If I understand correctly, (sense-)perception is not the result of a pre-conscious contact between an ‘I’ and a ‘world’. The ‘I’ and the ‘world’ do not precede their appearance chronologically. The ‘I’ and the ‘world’ are both phenomena, i.e. the ‘I-part’ is not a subject for whom the ‘world-part’ is present as an object, albeit it seems so. There is no ‘witness’ behind the scene. So in a sense phenomena are not ‘witnessed’ at all. They just ‘are’ (including ‘I’). Does this contradict your understanding?

In my view there is no room for a cause of consciousness which lies outside of consciousness or precedes consciousness chronologically, because I identify consciousness with existence, and a cause must exist to be a cause. But I have to admit that this view dissatisfies me in some way, because it seems to contradict parts of my experience. But unfortunately I see no other choice at present. But isn’t this pretty much the same as what Sister Vajirā thought?

[N. 5]

8 April 2009

I can agree with this up to a certain extent, because there are many things implied in your statement and I am not aware of them in every individual detail. No, there is no “witness” behind the scene, but this *only applies* to someone who is free from the Self-view. In other words, the presence of the Self-view, no matter how wrong it might be, is still *real* (as a misconception, of the most profound nature). Because of that the ‘witness’, the Self, comes to *be*. The Self exists, but not as the owner and creator of the experience. It exists as a part of it, a part which, as long as *avijjā* is not destroyed, will *assume* the ownership and mastery over our experience. The only way of freeing oneself from the Self is to repeatedly see *that which is Self*, as not-Self. As I said earlier on, in order to do so you have to first see the Self, as it is.

The very nature of the ignorance is to assume the existence of the things apart from the five aggregates (for a start, by simply not seeing the five aggregates at all). For a *puthujjana* it is said to be the one who assumes that Self is to be found somewhere outside the five aggregates, that it is something beyond our experience. As a result of that, any immediate perception, or feeling for example, is already being appropriated by this

view, since that “extra-temporal, changeless Self,” as Ven. Ñāṇavīra called it, appears to *precede* the appearance of phenomena of any kind. This idea of chronological precedence, as you called it, is often the cause of confusion in one’s mind, as a result of which the idea of mastery originates. If the Self would be seen as directly dependent upon the things which it is appropriating, the idea of mastery wouldn’t be possible to arise.

You wrote: “In my view there is no room for a cause of consciousness which lies outside of consciousness or precedes consciousness chronologically, because I identify consciousness with existence, and a cause must exist to be a cause.”

Could you please say something more about this? I am not sure that I correctly grasp what you mean. Let me try: you identify consciousness with existence,⁵ and because of that there cannot be a *preceding* cause for consciousness, since if there is, it would have to exist? That basically means that you cannot see which is first, consciousness or name-and-matter, which this whole thing comes to. The reason for that is simply because—and I am sure you are aware of it—there is *no first* among them. They are *simultaneous*. However, your suspicions are quite justified, since there is no reason to assume that consciousness is more *existence* than its ‘cause’, i.e. name-and-matter. In other words, assuming that consciousness *exists*, already distorts the nature of things. You cannot *see* the consciousness; you cannot imagine it. It’s there, and the reason we know that it is there, is because things *appear*. The existence of the *appearance* in itself is the ‘proof’ that consciousness exists, and *vice versa*, the existence of consciousness is also the ‘proof’ that appearance exists, since, things *do appear* after all. The appearance is the ‘cause’ of consciousness, but not an inch more than consciousness is the ‘cause’ of the appearance. So, you are right in saying that there is no room for the ‘external’ cause for consciousness, but not because consciousness *equals* existence, rather it is because the cause of consciousness depends upon consciousness, as much as consciousness depends upon it. Remember the simile of two sticks leaning on each other, if you remove one, the other will fall too. A hint: consciousness is, the ‘cause’ (name-and-matter) is, existence is.

Things appear, and that is the most immediate experience we can have; what is the most difficult thing to perform is to unravel that immediate experience correctly, i.e. *in a right way*. If this is fully accomplished, there won't be any room left for the ignorance to creep in again, and as a result of it, all of one's greed, aversion and delusion will slowly wither. When that happens, one will understand completely what the Buddha meant by freedom.

[M. 7]

9 April 2009

Your letter triggered some deeper understanding in me, because up to the present I was unable to see clearly the *connection* between the self as owner/master and the self as witness/subject: Only a self *behind* or *apart* from the scene (a 'witness') could have control over the scene. It is not so easy for me to describe in English what I mean, but I hope it is clear enough. The *puthujjana* takes experience as a proof that there is an experiencer, someone hidden behind the scene, who is in possession of the experience.

You wrote: "The Self exists, but not as the owner and creator of the experience. It exists as a part of it, a part which, as long as *avijjā* is not destroyed, will assume the ownership and mastery over our experience. The only way of freeing oneself from the Self, is to repeatedly see that which is Self, as not-Self."

So not the apparent 'Mathias' will vanish after awakening, but the idea that experience is '*his*' experience (in the sense of ownership and mastery)? 'Mathias' has to be seen as not-self, but will remain after that as part of the experience?

Ven. Ñāṇavīra wrote in his note on *viññāṇa*, that consciousness can be thought of as the *presence* (or existence) of a phenomenon (name-and-matter). So the phenomenon is neither present *within* consciousness (as a container) nor is it present to consciousness (as subject). Consciousness is just the fact *that there are* phenomena—their 'thatness' or presence is consciousness. From this it follows for me that consciousness *equals* presence or existence. Or to put it another way: There is no presence or existence of things (or causes) outside or independent of consciousness,

because things (or causes) cannot be outside or independent from their presence or existence. That was what I meant.

But you wrote: “So, you are right in saying that there is no room for the ‘external’ cause for consciousness, but not because consciousness equals existence, rather it is because the cause of consciousness depends upon consciousness, as much as consciousness depends upon it.”

Unfortunately I can’t see the difference. My understanding is that consciousness equals the existence or presence of name-and-matter (see Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s note on *viññāṇa*). Things appear, and that is consciousness—not the things, but their presence, the fact that they appear. But they appear to no one. They just appear out of nothing, but not chaotically: their appearing and disappearing follows the law of dependent origination. So if anything appears at all, consciousness is. Nothing can exist or appear ‘hidden’ from or ‘beyond’ consciousness, because the very fact that there are phenomena is consciousness. Consciousness itself is not present or existent, because it is the presence or existence (of phenomena).

This is my understanding so far. Can you see errors or mistakes with regard to my understanding of consciousness (*viññāṇa*)?

[N. 6]

9 April 2009

Just a quick note, before I fully reply to you later on. In my last explanation I took the *existence* in a ‘pregnant sense’, i.e. as being or *bhava*, thinking that’s what you meant by it. Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s note on *viññāṇa* takes the existence as *presence* of a phenomenon. These two things are quite different, and they can both be used either way, but we have to be careful to distinguish them correctly. Consciousness *always* equals presence, but for existence, it will depend on the context. Sorry for the confusion. Indeed, my reply still stands as it is, but could I please ask you to regard the existence, in this particular case, as *bhava*. If I come to use it in a different sense, I will duly note it.

[M. 8]

9 April 2009

I was not aware of existence as *bhava* in previous letters. I thought in terms of *viññāṇa* and therefore misunderstood what you said.

[N. 7]

11 April 2009

Let me try and reply to your letter in more detail.

That's indeed so. That which is known as 'Mathias' to you, no matter how vague it might be, is a complex thing made up of one, two or all five aggregates (depending on the strength of your appropriation). If you try to deny or overlook or simply not consider that 'Mathias' in your attempt to obtain understanding of things, you are leaving the parts of your experience behind, and because of that very action you are preventing yourself from gaining any (relevant) understanding at all. It is very difficult to include the Self in a phenomenological view of things, because, by its nature, it is a very ambiguous thing (Ven. Ñāṇavīra wrote extensively about it). Also, it is very difficult and almost impossible for people to comprehend the idea of "including something," without actually *affirming it*; and *vice versa*, to "exclude something," without *negating it*. So, due to this characteristic of an untrained human mind, any inclusion of Self in the practice of mindfulness is immediately an *affirmation of it*, and again *vice versa*, any exclusion of it, is *its negation* (which nonetheless affirms it again, just in the other direction). Nevertheless, in the practice of mindfulness one will at least have a possibility to recognize that Self which is there, and then perhaps eventually see it rightly as not-Self. When this not-Self view is thoroughly established, in that repetitive process of mindfulness, the Self (and the subtler forms of it—conceit I (am)) will vanish, leaving the 'empty' aggregates behind, "just standing there," until they finally break up.

As I said in my previous brief note, after clearing up the initial misunderstanding, consciousness *does equal* presence (of a thing). If we come to talk about its existence, then we will have to distinguish what we mean by it.

Your understanding of *viññāṇa* seems correct, but of course, I cannot say how much you are able to apply it to your own experience. The problem lies in the fact that it is very hard *not* to regard consciousness as *something*, and I am not sure to what extent you are doing this. Sometimes people think they bypassed this by regarding consciousness as *nothing*, but needless to say, that won't do either (see above about 'affirmation' and 'negation'; the principle is the same). Regarding consciousness as a thing (either *something* or *nothing*), means *assuming* (*upādāna*) its being. That's why in order to understand consciousness one has to approach it indirectly, to see it dependent upon something else different from it (*nāmarūpa*). The same of course applies to name-and-matter, since the only way to escape this 'affirmation'/'negation' attitude is through this indirect approach, in which one recognizes the subtler aspects within the whole picture, and then learns how to see things without actually having to grasp them. If I can refer you to our earlier correspondence, from last year I think, when I said that for people only 'positive' and 'palpable' things *exist*, they don't know how to regard a *negative* and if they come across it, people will either ignore it, or try to 'pin it down' and turn it into a positive, since only that level of presence for them means existence. Also it just came to my mind, compare in relation to this dualism of affirming and negating, the statement of the Buddha that the world is divided into two, those who say 'All is', and those who say 'All is not'.

I hope this is helpful in any way. Please feel free to let me know if you would like any further clarification.

[M. 9]

12 April 2009

So we have to distinguish between the individual (*puggala*) and the 'self' (*attā*). If I remember correctly, Ven. Ñāṇavīra said that the *puthujjana* cannot distinguish them, i.e. cannot see the difference.

At least intellectually I don't regard consciousness as 'something' (which is present). If, for example, a feeling is present, consciousness is the presence of that feeling. Consciousness is not the feeling nor observing the feeling nor containing the feeling. The problem here is not to identify consciousness with the 'self' in the sense of: "I am not the feeling (or

anything at all), but I am the presence of the feeling (and anything else).” This seems to happen in Advaita-Vedānta: The self is neither a thing nor all things, but existence (of things) itself. In a short essay about enlightenment, the author wrote that before his enlightenment he was “*Steve living his life*,”⁶ but since his enlightenment he is “*the experience of Steve living his life*.” The enlightenment did not destroy ‘Steve’, but ‘Steve’ is no longer regarded as the experiencer. Here I see a parallel to what you wrote (that ‘Mathias’ won’t vanish after awakening etc.). Very interesting. But the author said that he is the experience (or consciousness). And this is not the Buddha’s teaching. ‘I am’ *not* the presence of phenomena.

At the moment I am unable to formulate any further questions with regard to this topic. Thank you very much for your help. It is most appreciated.

[N. 8]

12 April 2009

You wrote: “If I remember correctly, Ven. Ñāṇavīra said that the *puthujjana* cannot distinguish them, i.e. cannot see the difference.” That is so. If a *puthujjana* manages to distinguish them, he will cease to be a *puthujjana*.

Yes, there are some similarities in what I’ve said, and what that person said, but there are also subtle, yet utterly *fundamental differences* between our respective explanations, and I am glad that you were able to see that. What usually happens with people is that once they discover their own power of reflexion (i.e. mindfulness), and the way how to step back from immediacy with which they were so much identified before, they become completely taken by it, and then they end up believing that they are actually ‘enlightened’. What they don’t realize, and they could only with the Buddha’s help, is that even the purest reflexion of all, is still *not beyond ignorance*, and if they want to really get enlightened they will have to address them both alike—immediacy and reflexion. (You will remember from *Clearing the Path*: “With Self, they perceive Self; with not-Self, they perceive Self; with Self, they perceive not-Self.” Only a *sekha* is able to perceive not-Self, *with not-Self*.)

What exactly gets destroyed in a process of understanding *anattā*, is clear only to a *sekha* and no one else, simply because for a *puthujjana* everything and nothing can be, and is, taken as Self.

[M. 10]

30 May 2009

I hope it is okay to ask you another question.

My understanding is that realism is a wrong view, i.e. that experience is not a copy or representation of something beyond or behind experience. Experience is nothing but the presence (*viññāṇa*) of the phenomena (*nāmarūpa*). There is no subject (self) to/for whom the phenomena appear. The subject (self) is itself only a phenomenon, albeit a special one and no longer present in the *arahat*.

The problem is that I draw certain (idealistic?) conclusions from that which for example seems to contradict other statements of Bhante Ñāṇavīra, like in his letter to Mr. Brady (1 January 1965):

The ordinary person (the *puthujjana* or ‘commoner’) thinks, ‘I feel; I perceive; I determine; I cognize’, and he takes this ‘I’ to refer to some kind of timeless and changeless ego or ‘self’. But the *arahat* has completely got rid of the ego-illusion (the conceit or concept ‘I am’), and, when he reflects, thinks quite simply, ‘Feeling feels; perception perceives; determinations determine; consciousness cognizes’. Perhaps this may help you to see how it is that when desire (craving) ceases altogether ‘the various things just stand there in the world’. Obviously they cannot ‘just stand there in the world’ unless they are felt, perceived, determined and cognized (Berkeley’s *esse est percipi* is, in principle, quite correct); but for the living *arahat* the question ‘Who feels, perceives, determines, cognizes, the various things?’ no longer arises—the various things are felt by feeling, perceived by perception, determined by determinations, and cognized by consciousness; in other words, they are ‘there in the world’ *autonomously* (actually they always were, but the *puthujjana* does not see this since he takes himself for granted). With the breaking up of the *arahat*’s body (his death) all this ceases. (For other people, of course, these things continue unless

and until they in their turn, having become *arahats*, arrive at the end of their final existence.)⁷

According to my understanding, there is (ultimately) no world (including other people) left after the breaking up of the *arahat*'s body, because 'world' is an experience and *not* something which lies beyond experience and is then copied or represented a billion-fold in the different consciousnesses of people and other living beings. My understanding is that there is only *one* (six-fold at present) consciousness. What 'I' call 'my' consciousness is the *only* consciousness there. The delusional 'self' and other people are *both* phenomena and do *not* possess their own consciousness. I know that many Buddhists think that after 'their' final death as an *arahat*, *saṃsāra* or life will go on *without* them. But this totally contradicts my understanding. And I think because of this wrong notion, the Mahāyāna arose. Someone could say: "The Buddha died and you are still here, therefore you are wrong." But this view is based on the 'objective' third-person-perspective, or the assumption that there is something like hidden consciousness 'in' phenomena, i.e. phenomena are treated as other subjects or 'selves' which possess their 'own' consciousness 'equal to me'. I think this is a wrong view. Most people seem to think of themselves as a human body or soul in a human body which is able to see, hear etc. and then they think that this applies to all the other human bodies too and to animals or even plants etc.

Do you think that I am wrong? There seem to be contradictions between my understanding and statements like the cited one of Bhante Ñāṇavīra. Why teach the Dhamma at all, because after *parinibbāna* the 'world' disappears anyway like a dream after waking up. No one is left-behind. Dream characters don't need help. They are just empty phenomena, with nothing behind/beyond them. If this is the case, why pretend otherwise? Why act 'as if'? It seems that I miss an important point somehow, but I don't see it. I can't treat other people like empty dream characters, but my head says they are only phenomena (like the 'self'), appearances like in a dream. That feels wrong.

The statement that there is no world left after death would apply only to someone who has managed to abandon *that* world during the lifetime, i.e. an *arahat*. The Buddha often tells us that after the *arahat*'s aggregates break up, there are no future rebirths for him. It is not possible to provide an intelligible answer for a *puthujjana* which would describe *nibbāna* (or even describe an *arahat* as a matter of fact). If a *puthujjana* would become a *sekha*, he would see that his inquiries into the nature of things 'after death', are out of place, not because it is morally wrong to ask such questions, it's simply because they *imply* that there is something after death, whether for an *arahat* or for an ordinary person, all the same; and this applies even if they say there is 'nothing' after that death, since the phenomenon of 'nothing' is still *something*.

You say further: "My understanding is that there is only one (six-fold at present) consciousness." I have an impression that you are not completely sure whether this is right or wrong. How many consciousnesses will be present depends on the type of approach we would take. The Buddha would often describe six classes of consciousness, depending on their respective objects (if I can recall it correctly he used a simile of the fire depending on the different fuels it might take). From those descriptions it is clear that there can be different consciousnesses. They all have their respective domains (eye, ear, nose, touch, taste and mind) and they don't interfere with each other. However, if for example, you decide to approach the experience through aggregates you will see that all of the different consciousnesses which might constitute one's experience are—namely *consciousness*. Thus, there would be only 'one' consciousness (but this would also apply to the remaining aggregates—matter, feeling, perception, determinations).

Incidentally, the view that there is *only one* consciousness, as opposed to multiple forms, feelings etc. is why consciousness is most often regarded as Self. If one would see its plurality the idea of mastery would vanish, because the Self always tends to be associated with singularity.

The danger of regarding the *world* as 'only' an experience, is that you might come to ignore the actual, *real* existence of matter. Although things appear as phenomena, those phenomena are *also real*, they have a material

aspect to them. They would never be able to come into being without something to appear (*rūpa*). This of course does not mean that after death, when the world disappears, the matter will remain (in a sense of a public property). It means that the ‘world’, whether of a *puthujjana* or an *arahat*, is a complex unity made of *nāmarūpa-viññāṇa*. If you start speculating whether, for example, the matter you are experiencing on some occasion together with other people is the same as the matter which *they* are experiencing, you should be aware that such thoughts operate under an inherent assumption that you ‘yourSelf’ is, and the other, ‘themSelves’, are. Then indeed, things which appear ‘in common’, to your respective experiences will somehow be ‘out there’, ‘outside’, as opposed to ‘in here’ within ‘myself’. Thoughts about whether the world will or will not exist after the *arahat*’s death (i.e. whether *saṃsāra* will continue to be for the other people), do not apply to anything, they are simply unintelligible (for an *arahat* at least).

You say: “It seems that I miss an important point somehow, but I don’t see it. I can’t treat other people like empty dream characters, but my head says they are only phenomena (like the ‘self’), appearances like in a dream. That feels wrong.”

It feels wrong indeed, and that is because you are trying to impose (or perhaps even force upon, sometimes) your view over *the way* you experience things. When the experience of others ‘feels real’, i.e. they don’t feel like an empty phenomenon, you should take *that as a starting point* of your contemplation. Surely the Suttas say that nothing is Self, but as long as you are not a *sekha*, you won’t see that, so you will end up trying to impose your views of what the Self and not-Self are, *over* the state of things, as they appear. Instead of that, you should try seeing them *within what is already given* in any experience. No question, you can’t help but *having views*, at this stage at least, but what you can do is to discover the things onto which they can correctly apply. And this is nothing but an example of *understanding*—when your view ‘matches’ the actual experience... so to speak. When that happens you come to see things for yourself, and then *any* experience (free from lust, aversion and delusion of course) can teach you as it is, because you will see it correctly.

I hope this helps, please feel free to let me know if there are any points requiring further clarification.

P.S. Ven. Ñāṇavīra's paragraph you quoted refers to the *arahat's* experience, and for him *parinibbāna* will be the end, when everything will cease to exist. However he, the *arahat*, will also know that as long as the ignorance is still present around, in forms of others, *for them*, death will not be the end.

[M. 11]

1 June 2009

Thank you for your answer. Sometimes I have trouble to explain in English what I mean. I wrote that, according to my understanding, there is only one consciousness, which is six-fold at present.

I agree with you. But with “one consciousness” I did not mean ‘one’ consciousness in opposition to its ‘manifold’ content. What I meant was that (according to my understanding) there is no *other* consciousness outside of *this* (‘my’) consciousness. ‘I’ and ‘others’ are both part of the manifold content, but neither ‘I’ nor ‘others’ possess their own consciousness, so to speak. In other words: There is only *one* set of the five aggregates which includes the *whole* apparent world (including ‘me’ and ‘others’). I conclude this from my understanding of *anattā*, because if consciousness is not ‘my’ consciousness it must be ‘*the*’ consciousness. If we deny that there is only *one* consciousness (in the aforementioned sense), we have to explain why the assumed *consciousness of other people* is hidden from us (e.g. why we can’t see with *their* eyes etc.) I think that such an explanation is impossible without the assumption of an *attā*, self or subject, because if neither *this* (‘my’) consciousness nor *that* (‘their’) consciousness belongs to ‘me’, *both were equal* with regard to ownership, which means that either the consciousness of ‘other’ people was not hidden (like ‘my’ consciousness is not hidden) or that ‘my’ consciousness was as hidden as the consciousness of ‘others’. Therefore I think that the teachings of *anattā* exclude the possibility of various beings which all possess their own consciousness, each hidden from the consciousness of the others.

I hope I have made myself clear. It’s not so easy, not even in my native language German. I once tried to explain this to another Buddhist, but he was not able to get the message. I pondered about this problem as a child

already and I had (later) to reject all religions and philosophies with the exception of Buddhism, because most of them did not even see this problem, let alone were able to offer a solution. I read a short article about Ven. Ñāṇavīra in a German Buddhist magazine many years ago, which cited a part of his note on *viññāṇa* (all in German) and at the same moment I had the solution to my problem (I mean this particular problem). If I had not discovered the writings of Ven. Ñāṇavīra, I probably would have quitted Buddhism altogether sooner or later. But sometimes I have the impression that I have misunderstood him.

You wrote: “The danger of regarding the *world* as ‘only’ an experience, is that you might come to ignore the actual, *real*, existence of matter. Although things appear as phenomena, those phenomena are *also real*, they have a material aspect to them. They would never be able to come into being without something to appear (*rūpa*). This of course does not mean that after death, when the world disappears, the matter will remain (in a sense of a public property). It means that the ‘world’, whether of a *puṭhujjana* or an *arahat*, is a complex unity made of *nāmarūpa-viññāṇa*.”

I think this is the point where I can’t follow you and Ven. Ñāṇavīra. In his note on *rūpa* he says: “In itself, purely as inertia or behaviour, matter cannot be said to *exist*.” If matter does not exist in itself, how can we say that it is more than an abstraction from experience?

[N. 10]

4 June 2009

Indeed, I thought that you were referring to something else, hence I replied in the way I did. However, after reading your latest paragraphs, I still don’t think that it was significantly different (please feel free to correct me if I’m wrong).

You say: “What I meant was that (according to my understanding) there is no *other* consciousness outside of *this* (‘my’) consciousness.” Saying that there is “no other consciousness outside this consciousness,” means *assuming* that the consciousness is after all (on the *level* of you and others, i.e. on the level of Self). That also means, that in this case, for you, there is ‘one’ consciousness. The reason why I was talking of ‘plurality of consciousness’ (and other aggregates) was that if you would manage to

see that, for example, this one consciousness which is part of my experience now (i.e. five aggregates) depends upon the fact that there is *consciousnesses at all*, then it won't really matter whether there is only 'your' consciousness or whether there are consciousnesses of 'others' too.

If this can help: imagine two absolutely identical things, in every possible aspect these two things are the same and by looking at them it is not possible to distinguish them at all. In one sense, it would be correct to say that there is *no difference between them*, they are the *same*, but then, in another sense, it would also be correct to say that there is *a difference between them*, with difference being—they are *two*. So, no matter how identical two things might be, the fact that *there are two of them*, means that there is a difference, one being first, and the other being second. (Remember Ven. Ñāṇavīra saying that it takes “two to make the same.”) Because of the nature of this principle, whenever you have *any* consciousness (or any other aggregate, as a matter of fact), you can say that “there is consciousness,” referring to that particular ‘arising’ of aggregates. If, however, on the next occasion you would say “there is consciousness *again*,” that would already imply the assumption of consciousnesses being the *same*, on those *different occasions* (or perhaps being *different*, or *neither-same-nor-different*, etc.) [Also note Ven. Ñāṇavīra's comment that it is the self-sameness of a thing, that the Self is being confused with ('Shorter Notes', ATTĀ)]. Thus, although in *one sense* it is true to say that “there is consciousness again,” since you cannot perceive any difference between them (presence is a presence no matter what), to *assume* that they are the same is wrong. Consciousness has an extra difficulty to it, and that is that it can be known only in regard to its respective object (that which it is *not*).

Please let me know how much this actually makes sense to you (if at all), since this matter doesn't lend itself to an easy explanation.

After the above was said, your comment that: “There is only *one* set of the five aggregates which includes the *whole* apparent world” should be seen in the same light.

Your last question: “If matter does not exist in itself, how can we say that it is more than an abstraction from experience?” In brief—by seeing the structural order of aggregates (which is not possible to alter), you will see that matter *has to come first*, and then you will know *how* to look for it,

within the experience. The experience arises and ceases, and whether you regard its certain aspect as abstraction or reality, the *experience has to be there first.* In practical terms, if you are having difficulties grasping what is meant by *rūpa*, try contemplating it on the *level of feelings.* When you feel, you always feel *something*, and it is not accidental that the next aggregate after matter is feeling.

I'll stop here for now, so as to give you the opportunity to think about it and form questions which can help you understand things for yourself.

[M. 12]

5 June 2009

I will try again to explain what I mean, because I want to be sure that we talk about the same thing.

When I look at the computer screen, there is the impression of a screen 'out there' opposing a me 'in here', which is looking at the screen or to whom the screen appears. But when I look closely, this inner subject is itself an appearance, because it lies not beyond experience. So the experience is not the experience of this subject ('my experience'), but this subject ('my') is itself an experience. From that, it follows that experience does not mean that objects appear to a subject, but only that phenomena (*nāmarūpa*) are present (*viññāṇa*). And now the important point with regard to this topic: This presence (consciousness) of phenomena (including 'me' and 'others') is of course *not* "on the level of you and others, i.e. on the level of Self" to say it with your words. That's what I meant. If '*my self*' is not the experiencer, but only an experience, how could '*others*' be experiencers? So there are ultimately no experiencers at all, neither 'in here' nor 'out there'. That's the reason why I said that there is 'no other consciousness outside this consciousness', because if there are no experiencers, experience can only differ with regard to content, but not with regard to ownership.

Does this new explanation make any difference to you?

This is indeed correct: “when I look closely, this inner subject is itself an appearance, because it lies not beyond experience. So the experience is not the experience of this subject (‘my experience’), but this subject (‘my’) is itself an experience.”

Also: “If ‘my self’ is not the experiencer, but only an experience, how could ‘others’ be experiencers?”

They can’t, and that’s what is meant by *anattā*; when one realizes that one’s Self is actually an impermanent phenomenon, i.e. not-Self, then the ‘Selves’ of others (no matter how different they might appear to different individuals) will automatically be seen in the same light as not-Self.

“So there are ultimately no experiencers at all, neither ‘in here’ nor ‘out there’.” Up to this point I agree with you, but what leads you to the conclusion that there is “*no other consciousness outside this consciousness, because if there are no experiencers, experience can only differ with regard to content, but not with regard to ownership*”?

To me this line shows that, although you rightly see that the existence of the ‘owner’ of the experience is incompatible with the actual way things appear, still when it comes to practical terms, it seems that you identify consciousness with the Self, so if the Self cannot be found neither ‘in here’ nor ‘out there’ you conclude that there is ‘no other consciousness outside this consciousness’ too.

The removal of the Self (either external or internal) does *not* remove consciousness (either external or internal). It does remove the ownership, but not *the point of view*, which you seem to confuse by saying: “experience can only differ with regard to content, but not with regard to ownership.”

Do you see what I mean? Even the consciousness of the most immediate object is not *yours*; if you permit a looser expression: it belongs more to the object (five aggregates) than it belongs to you. And when you have an experience of ‘others’, surely there is no real ownership over the experience involved, but nevertheless, the fact that they are others means there is consciousness involved, different than yours, but even that consciousness does not belong to them either; and for you it is simply *external*. The difference is subtle, and if you would manage to see it you

would be able to distinguish between an individual and a person. Here is a quote from *Clearing the Path* (L. 93, 25th January 1964):

“in other words, the nature of the relation between consciousness and name-and-matter cannot be the same as that between one consciousness and another (the former relation is *internal*, the latter *external*).”⁸

This can be applied to both—different consciousnesses within one set of aggregates (oneself), or different consciousnesses within different sets of aggregates (others).

I hope this explains the difference I was perceiving between our respective views on this matter. Yet, again, it is possible that I didn’t completely comprehend what you meant, so feel free to clarify even further, if you still think we are not referring to the same thing.

[M. 13]

8 June 2009

I’m sure now that we refer to the same thing.

I will try to answer your question. The crucial point for me is indeed the *point of view*. According to my understanding there is in a sense no point of view in the first place, so it doesn’t need to be removed. But I have to explain this, because it sounds absurd at first. Ludwig Wittgenstein said: “Nothing in the visual field allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye.”⁹ And Ven. Ñāṇavīra said in his note on *phassa*: “In visual experience, then, *forms are seen, the eye is unseen*, yet (as our other faculties or a looking-glass informs us) *there is the eye*.”¹⁰ So we actually need our other senses or a looking-glass to inform us that there is an eye *at all*. But this ‘eye’ (touched by the hands or seen with the help of a looking-glass) is *just another appearance* and therefore *cannot be regarded as the thing on which the point of view or the perspective depends*. The same applies to the other senses or sense-organs (ear, nose etc.). Or in other words: We may call the apparent eye ‘internal’ and the apparent (other) visual things ‘external’, but with regard to the field of visual (or any other) experience *itself* the terms ‘internal’ or ‘external’ do not apply, because there is no border to be found which separates experience from non-experience or ‘other’

experience. Let me summarize: A point of view, from which we look at things, ultimately cannot be found, because whatever we find is itself a thing and not the assumed 'inner end' of the perspective, from which we seem to look at things. Therefore I think that the belief in such a point of view cannot be justified/verified. You somehow seem to point to this fact by saying: "Even the consciousness of the most immediate object is not *yours*; if you permit a looser expression: it belongs more to the object (five aggregates) than it belongs to you."

I understand that the consciousness of a phenomenon is not *mine*, because consciousness is just the presence of that phenomenon, so it actually has to belong to its 'object' and not to someone looking at the object. But I really don't see the difference between an internal or external someone who is looking at objects and an internal or external point of view, from which objects are looked at. My understanding is that phenomena in the non-*arahat* are just present in a way which seems to imply the existence of a subject or point of view 'outside' or 'inside' and therefore of perspective, but ultimately the 'room' which separates 'me' from the world of 'other' phenomena is a delusion, because the 'me' is a delusion.

I can't see any 'room' between consciousness and its content (name-and-matter), because consciousness is just the presence of its 'content' and not a different thing in the sense of an observer or container. From 'my point of view' *I cannot distinguish 'Mathias' and 'other people' in terms of consciousness*. Because within the field of 'my' experience, 'Mathias' is 'content' and 'other people' are 'content' too. 'I' and 'others' are different of course, but only with regard to appearance, not with regard to presence or consciousness, because *both are equally present or conscious*. The reason why I can't say that other people have consciousness is the same reason why I can't say that 'Mathias' has consciousness, because 'Mathias' is part of the scenery, like 'other people'. And consciousness is just the presence of that scenery. To talk about 'internal' consciousness and 'external' consciousness makes no sense to me, because *I cannot locate consciousness 'in here' or 'out there'*. That is another way for me to explain why 'there is no other consciousness outside this consciousness'. I can say that there are other bodies outside of this ('my') body or I may even

perceive the thoughts of ‘other people’, but consciousness is ‘phenomenally absent’ in any case.

I hope you understand what I mean. Please correct me again if you think that I’m wrong. At present I cannot see clearly that, and why, I am perhaps wrong with regard to this topic, but the suspicion is there. My approach is a bit like ‘solipsism without the solipsist’, so to speak.

[N. 12]

13 June 2009

You mentioned in your reply that: “this ‘eye’ (touched by the hands or seen with the help of a looking-glass) is just another appearance and therefore cannot be regarded as the thing on which the point of view or the perspective depends.” The eye, and the other senses, are indeed “just another appearance,” another *thing*, but it is a thing *upon which seeing depends*. As Ven. Ñāṇavīra points out in his early correspondence with Ven. Ñāṇamoli—“the eye *subjectively does not appear at all* (which is why the description of *phassa* must be made as if from an outside point of view).”¹¹ He goes on in saying: “Reflexively described the eye is, in fact, the perceiver and conceiver of the world—the *attā*—: but neither reflexive eye nor *attā* is to be found.”¹² (For more details see: EL 92.)

This means nothing but seeing the Self, *attā*, as not-Self, *anattā*. However, in order to do this, it is important to have this *reflexive attitude*, and not to give in to the assumption that eye=self. If you maintain this you might be able to see that because of this lump of flesh, called eye, your sight *exists*, it is here, *present*. You don’t identify that eye which appears with Self, you see it as it is, and as you already said: “it’s just another appearance” (but as the appearance, upon which appearing of the sights exist). This reflexive picture can also show you how *things are genuinely beyond your control* (by this I mean that they are *impermanent*). When something so immediate, personal, like a ‘sight’, is seen depending upon something external, impersonal and impermanent, like this “lump of flesh,” you will by default stop regarding it as self. Someone can of course persuade themselves to believe (and that wouldn’t be difficult at all) that “this sight” depends upon “this lump of flesh,” but that will not be enough (i.e. they won’t really see it for themselves, or rather they won’t *feel* it),

because it omits the Self from the picture. That is why I said that you will have to learn how to maintain that reflexive picture, and then refine it, because only in reflexion (mindfulness) can you see the direct dependence of things upon their causes (i.e. not regard them as Self). Again, when you see that “looking at the object” is only possible because of the existence of the eye-organ, and that as soon as the eye-organ disappears the looking would disappear too, then you will *feel and regard* that sight as not-self. Thus the eye-organ is not the problem, the reflexive description of the eye is not the problem, but the implicit assumption that the eye is *that* “perceiver and conceiver” of the world, which appears in the act of reflexion, is *that* which is a problem.

You continue: “A point of view, from which we look at things, ultimately cannot be found, because whatever we find is itself a thing and not the assumed ‘inner end’ of the perspective, from which we seem to look at things.” Indeed, there is no “inner end” to be found, it can only be assumed, as you already pointed out. However, you are going wrong in *another assumption*, which is that the “inner end” and “point of view” are the same thing. “Inner end” (whatever we take it to be) is clearly something which is a property of the Self, its domain, or even the Self itself. However, “point of view” is nothing but the *way things present themselves*. I will remind you that every experience is intentional, it has a purpose or ‘direction’, and that is nothing but this point of view we are talking about.

Let me know how this strikes you. I would like to leave the subject of ‘me’ and ‘others’ for later, since it can be too much together with the things I already said. Let me just quickly add something which might help and this is—when in ‘others’ there is only ‘others’, then all of the confusion regarding oneself (and others) will cease.

[M. 14]

14 June 2009

What you said is plausible. Let me summarize my understanding of your words:

1) Albeit the eye does not see (is not self or subject) it is the thing (phenomenon) upon which seeing depends.

2) The eye in the description of *phassa* is not the eye which “subjectively does not appear at all” but the eye which is “just another appearance.”

3) The “point of view” is the way things present themselves and not an external point which ‘subjectively does not appear at all’.

What I don’t understand yet is this: “when in ‘others’ there is only ‘others’, then all of the confusion regarding oneself (and others) will cease.” I had some short glimpses, but I cannot reproduce them.

[N. 13]

18 June 2009

A question (or actually—questions): Do you really *see* consciousness? Or do you *know* it exists? Or is it already *given* together with the experience? Do you take the *existence* to be the mere presence, or something more?

Things, as long as they are affected with ignorance, will point to a subject. When there is a subject—I—there will be others too, as its counterpart, i.e. that which is the same as me, but not me. You can never *prove* the existence of others, nor could you prove anything else in terms which are usually meant by ‘proving’. This is simply because there is nothing to be proved, but nevertheless that does not stop most people maintaining that desire for a proof. In order to prove something, that something already has to *be* (*bhava*), and ‘proving’ it means nothing but gratifying its very being. The nature of craving has many ways of expressing itself, loosely speaking, and the only way for someone to end it, is to see and understand *that which is already given within the experience*, as opposed to try and gratify it and increase its presence.

In the light of this, let me try and explain ‘I’ and ‘others’ as parts of the experience as a whole. The difficulty people come across when they approach the problem of ‘others’ is that they cannot go beyond their own sense of ‘I’. There is a very good reason for this, being that sense of ‘others’ already *incorporates* the sense of ‘I’ (and certainly *vice versa*). If, however, a person ceases to regard oneself as Self, i.e. if he understands *anattā*, the others will cease to exist too (in a sense which things in general cease to exist for *sekha* and *arahat*).

Thus, for an *arahat*, others as ‘selves’ do not exist, but the things in the world [which were *others*] are still there. The issue is not to prove their

existence, in terms of a material proof, the issue is to cease to *assume it*. That's what I meant when I said "in others there are just others." It can read "in things (*dhammā*), which are others, there are just things (*dhammā*)."

In a form of a more practical approach—try *recognizing* the five aggregates *in the given experience* rather than formulating and imagining them 'on top of it' (which no-one can initially prevent). The point is that once you start seeing them (the aggregates), things which existed on account of their not-seeing will disappear, *upādāna* being the chief amongst them. In different words, things *do not require existence* in order to appear, fundamentally speaking of course, and once you recognize their appearance on their own accord, their existence will vanish.

[M. 15]

20 June 2009

You ask: "Do you really *see* consciousness? Or do you *know* it exists? Or is it already *given* together with the experience? Do you take the *existence* to be the mere presence, or something more?"

When I 'step back' and 'look at' my experience, I become aware of the fact *that* phenomena are (present). It is this 'thatness' which I call consciousness. And I somehow identify this mere presence with existence. Because of that understanding I actually have to think that things only exist as long as I perceive them or better: as long as they are perceived. But that feels wrong, because the world seems to function autonomically. I don't have to look at things or know them in order to make them function. But my understanding of consciousness prohibits me from thinking that matter is independent of consciousness because that would mean that matter is there without being there. So I live with views which contradict my experience, but I can't let them go, because they seem to be true. A dilemma. And I don't know at which point the errors creep in.

You wrote: "In a form of a more practical approach—try *recognizing* the five aggregates, *in the given experience*, rather than formulating and imagining them 'on top of it'..." By "existence" you still mean a wrongly assumed existence (being) here (because of ignorance or not-seeing) and not *viññāṇa*, right?

During the last few days I was confronted again with a very strong fear of sickness and death. I think I would possibly lose my mind if I really had to die now. There is no room for illusions at death's door, at least not for me. I feel so utterly helpless and disillusioned. Additionally I hear these ghosts (or whatever it is...) making fun of me, calling me a "f... Buddhist" etc. I see their faces like imprints on the walls and on the carpet for example. No human could look like them. So fierce and so filthy. Harming others and sexuality are their main themes. I hope it is okay that I mention these things.

[N. 14]

23 June 2009

You should attempt to understand that your *views* about experience (whatever they might be), views about what comes first, what second, what is independent and what not in that experience, *all require the experience*. The experience comes first, and that is why *samādhī* is important in one's practice, because in order to maintain that picture of the priority of experience in general, you have to be able to hold it for the time being, without interfering, so to speak.

The nature of the (wrong) views is that once they come to existence, let's say after a certain experience, they *bring* the assumption of their *priority over that experience*. Very often we hear about "the laws of nature," "laws of mind" etc. that scientists or any kind of researchers proclaim. All of those laws (read 'views') are being obtained *from the individual occurrences* of nature and of one's experience. It is by forgetting this fact that people *assume* that those 'laws' possess *priority over* those very occurrences simply because they appear as *more general* in one's experience. (They are more general in the hierarchy of consciousness indeed, but they are *not* independent of the particular instances they were determined from. This is another thing that people don't see.) That explains Ven. Ñāṇavīra's contempt for statistics in mathematics (somewhere in the 'Early Letters' he was discussing this with Ven. Ñāṇamoli Thera). Statistics are probably the best example of this principle taken too far. To make it clear, no one denies that the more general patterns are deducible from the individual instances of experience, but

giving in to a view that those patterns are laws, in terms of *determining* the individual instances, is wrong. This is because these views are directly opposed to the *individual approach* to one's existence, and because they are incompatible with the nature of impermanence (i.e. the impermanence becomes a matter of fact, statistically 'provable'; impermanence is not a fact, it is a personal *issue*).

Thus your views about the world are dependent upon that world. You seem surprised that even though you know that the views you hold are wrong, they somehow refuse to disappear and go away. We are not bound with our views intellectually, our connection is on the emotional level. The most important thing in getting rid of the wrong views is to continuously *keep seeing them as wrong* (and *why* they are wrong). It will take time before those affective bonds break, but nevertheless, if you persist, they will have to. All this of course presupposes that you are trying to abandon those views by developing the right ones, found in the Suttas and Ven. Ñāṇavīra's writings, and they too require a lot of repetition and effort.

Yes. By "existence" I meant *bhava*. By not-seeing things in their arising and ceasing, and changing while standing, i.e. in their impermanence, they cease to be 'just' present, they *are*. 'Are' in terms of they are being personally lived and attended to. With the *arahat* things are just present, because an *arahat is-not* (but he is also attending them).

Regarding the appearances which are harassing you, you know it for yourself that we are all perceiving the world in different ways. It is not that the appearances are the problem, it is the affective significance that they (might) carry. (Remember that even the Buddha was closely followed and hassled by Māra for six years after his Awakening, and even later he kept appearing trying to seduce his mind. But the Buddha was quenched, so there was no fire to be stirred in his mind.) In your case, I would recommend patience (a lot of it). The important thing is that you don't act upon them (and things they suggest), and if you persist in your striving, their emotional pressure will drain away, and you will end up getting used to them and eventually not really minding whether they are present or not.

In my case, in my youth, I had a lot of anxieties which would arise without any particular or discernible reasons, and which would create a

lot of pressure in me and desire to get rid of it. It was certainly not a pleasant state to be in, but now I am able to tell that it did help me a lot, simply because over a course of time (and practice) my mind became capable of facing it without being overwhelmed by it, and then eventually seeing its nature. You might be surprised how much the lack of our understanding is the reason for our suffering. (Once understood, anxiety ceased to be an anxiety, by that I mean it ceased to create the suffering as before; the thing which was an anxiety continue to appear, of course.)

Perhaps I'm thinking too much about these things. Sometimes I wonder why I follow the Buddha's teachings at all. If I honestly ask myself what I really want, the answer is that *I want to live forever*, without being confronted with sickness, aging and death. The problem is that I am in fact confronted with these horrible things. So I want to avoid them. I don't want to go through them, *because I fear them so much*. That's my main motivation. Fear. The Buddha seems to be the only one who clearly describes a way to escape death before it actually occurs and not by attaining and waiting for an eternal pleasurable afterlife. If someone were able to assure me that I am unable to attain at least stream-entry or solving the problem in this very life I would quit Buddhism altogether. Why? Because Buddhism would then no longer be the solution to my problem. The afterlife is at best or at worst an *extension* of my *present* problems, but the afterlife is not the problem itself. Even in heaven I would certainly ask myself: "Will this happy state come to an end some day? And what then? What can I do to prevent this from happening?" But I think I would even practise if there were a proof that there is no afterlife at all, maybe I would try even harder, I don't know. I don't fear future lives as such, I only fear that the *present problems* will remain (which they certainly do if not solved *now*), so there is absolutely no need to wait for me. Some Buddhists seem to be able to motivate themselves only with the help of the belief in rebirth. For me this is maybe 5% of my motivation, because I don't see rebirth and therefore cannot gain much motivation out of that. But I believe of course in rebirth, because the Buddha said so, but my problem lies not in the future.

I think I should invest a bit more effort in meditation, but unfortunately I'm often so agitated or bored and tired that I can't sit for very long without longing for distraction. But there seems to be also a deeper problem underlying the others. Although the goal of the path (and therefore of meditation too) is the cessation of suffering, which sounds good, this is inextricably linked with *the end of the 'I'*. And that scares me. The life that I know will come to an end. Not that my life is so great (the contrary is the case), but the extinction of the 'I' is why I fear death. So if meditation leads somehow to the same thing, I just cannot want to

meditate just as I cannot want death. I know of course that the Self is an illusion, but I don't see it yet. And I am actually scared of seeing that 'all this' is 'not true'. I don't want to suffer, but I don't want the Self to come to an end. I just cannot want the end of the Self—I think that is the main problem which underlies my hesitance. For me this is an important insight. But by becoming aware of that, I become increasingly discouraged, because I feel trapped, since both ways, the biological one and the meditative one, seem to lead to the end of the Self. I am of course aware that the Buddha did not teach the destruction of the Self, but *on an emotional level* it still seems that 'I' have to die in order to attain the goal of freedom from suffering. Do you see a way to overcome this kind of fear with regard to meditation? Is it just a matter of trusting the Buddha?

I seem to be in a somewhat similar situation like you in your youth. And it really seems that lack of understanding is the reason that my anxiety was able to grow to such a big extent. I had to retire and receive a pension because of that, although I'm only 29 years old. A few days ago I thought that the Buddha was in this age when he left the life of a householder. And six years later he finally attained *nibbāna* without the help of (Buddhist) teachers.

[M. 17]

26 June 2009

In one of your former letters you wrote: "In a form of a more practical approach—try *recognizing* the five aggregates, *in the given experience*, rather than formulating and imagining them 'on top of it', ..."

I want to make sure that I understand this correctly. As a simile, the painting of a landscape comes into my mind. The paint on the canvas shows a landscape but apart from that the landscape is *not there*. If one is not aware of the paint on the canvas, one just sees the landscape. In this simile, the five aggregates are the paint on the canvas. If one does not see the paint, one wrongly assumes that the landscape exists on its own, maybe by mistaking the painting for a window. But if one sees the paint on the canvas, the landscape ceases to exist (*bhava*). There is only the presence (*viññāṇa*) of the paint (*nāmarūpa*).

In the same way the experience of the *puthujjana* shows him existing houses, trees, oceans, animals, peoples, mountains, etc. His experience says that all this is there, including himself. But in fact there is only the presence of name-and-matter or the five aggregates. Whatever he experiences, all that is just the five aggregates. In the experience of a tree for example there is ‘just’ present (*viññāṇa*) a coloured shape (*saññā*) of a certain behaviour (*rūpa*) together with a certain feeling (*vedanā*) and certain ‘intentions’ (*cetanā*). If he doesn’t see that the tree is entirely made up of the aggregates he thinks that it’s there on its own (*bhava*).

This is my understanding of what you wrote. Do you think that’s correct (including the simile)? Or do I misinterpret you?

My last letter was perhaps a bit emotional. I want to apologize for that.

[N. 15]

28 June 2009

There is no need for apologizing for the emotions in your letters. It is a sign that you are actually trying to understand the Buddha’s Teaching, and some amount of frustration is inevitable.

I agree with your statement, but only up to a certain extent. You say: “the paint on the canvas *shows* a landscape but apart from that the landscape is *not there*”; the landscape is there, *as paint on the canvas*. The ‘real’ landscape is of course somewhere else, but that landscape is *not directly dependent* upon the landscape encountered in the picture; the painted landscape is a mere ‘linear’ representation of the actual one, they are not fundamentally related to each other (like *dharmas-saṅkhāra*), i.e. they are *two different experiences*. In order to see the impermanence you have to see a thing within the thing, and then to see that one *determines* the other. As Ven. Ñāṇavīra said, when you see that this thing, which is Self, depends upon something else, which is not-self and impermanent, by default you will stop regarding the original thing as Self too.

Painted landscape is a *thing*, and it is there in space, on the wall, with significance (if the painting used to belong to your late grand-grandfather let’s say for example, it will be much more valuable than if someone bought it at the market for cheap money). However, you can regard the paint in itself (blue, green or whatever is on the canvas) as a *thing* too; and

as you guess by now, there is no end to this and you can go on indefinitely (apart from the given limits dictated by the capabilities of one's perception [see Fundamental Structure]). The point is not to follow things in a *linear* way, so to speak—real landscape, landscape on the canvas, paint, canvas, etc.—the point is to see how and in which way they *determine* each other (in a way that is relevant for the Self).

You wrote: “In the same way the experience of the *puthujjana* shows him existing houses, trees, oceans, animals, peoples, mountains, etc. His experience says that all this is there, including himself. But in fact there is only the presence of name-and-matter or the five aggregates.”

Indeed, there is a presence of name-and-matter only, but *nāmarūpa* is present as houses, trees, oceans, animals, people, etc. The things are not the problem, the fact that you suffer on account of them is (or rather on account of the lack of understanding). There is a strong tendency in one's mind to *deny* things, thinking that is what the Buddha taught. (Remember Sister Vajirā's letter, when she said exactly the same.)¹³ What one has to do is to see how to let go of them, without denying them (nor affirming, nor neither-denying-nor-affirming... see the principle?).

You wrote: “If he doesn't see that the tree is entirely made up of the aggregates he thinks that it's there on its own (*bhava*).” This is correct, though I would re-formulate it to say: if he doesn't see that the tree is *determined* as a tree (and that means made of aggregates), he will think that it is *there* on its own, opposed to what is *here*, i.e. Self. Only in this whole context you might be able to understand *bhava*.

In your previous letter you asked: “Do you see a way to overcome this kind of fear with regard to meditation? Is it just a matter of trusting the Buddha?” It is a matter of trusting the Buddha, but it is also a matter of taking it step-by-step. Sometimes it is just a dry discipline that is required. You don't necessarily have to sit for many hours, try with just one, or even half-an-hour. But when you do sit, then *sit*. If you can meditate *while* you are sitting that's good, if you can't, then still, *sit*. If you can't follow your breath, then contemplate the Teaching. Try seeing the suffering *in* your experience, the suffering in itself, not dependent upon the external causes and perceptions. See that when there is suffering present your mind *leans away* from it, and how it *goes towards* the pleasures when you

encounter them. There are many things that you can investigate, so don't think that in order to meditate 'properly' you have to sit still and 'empty' your mind of all of the content (which is impossible, at least in terms of what is commonly supposed by that. Truly speaking, cessation of perception-and-feeling is the only state where the mind is 'empty', i.e. it ceases).

[M. 18]

29 June 2009

Thank-you for your letter. It was helpful again.

1. So does seeing a "thing within the thing" mean to see the aggregates in the things which exist dependently on them?

2. You wrote: "The things are not the problem, [...] What one has to do is to see how to let go of them, without denying them (nor affirming, nor neither-denying-nor-affirming... see the principle?)"

I think so, but would it be correct to say that, in order to let go of things, it is necessary to see that things do not exist in the sense of *bhava*?

3. You wrote: "This is correct, though I would re-formulate it to say: if he doesn't see that the tree is *determined* as a tree (and that means made of aggregates), he will think that it is *there* on its own, opposed to what is here, i.e. Self. Only in this whole context you might be able to understand *bhava*."

If I understand you correctly, the "here" (Self) depends on the not-seeing of things as determined (made of aggregates), because this not-seeing makes them appear as if they are 'there' on their own. In other Words: "Self" stands not on its own but depends on the way things appear under the influence of ignorance.

Thank you for that helpful advice on meditation.

1. It depends how you approach it, but I would rather say that seeing a thing within a thing means seeing the nature of *saṅkhāra-dhamma* relationship. When you see that a thing directly depends upon another thing (and by that I mean that it is impossible for that thing to be present if its cause is not present too), then you would be able to let go of that thing, especially if you see that it is determined by something which is impermanent, suffering and not-self.

2. Indeed, because what you are letting go is their *being*, not their appearance, and that being is to be found, as I mentioned earlier on, on the affective level of our existence.

3. Correct. Imagine a lit candle in a dark room. The light which appears on account of that burning candle is not directly related to it, i.e. the candle is not the light, but as long as the candle is burning there will be light. As long as that light is there, you will see things in that dark room, since the light makes them visible. The relationship of the Self and aggregates is very similar. Aggregates are not Self, but as long as they are burning (as long as there is *avijjā* present), the Self will be *generated* in relation to them. As long as the Self is there, things which depend upon the existence of the Self will come too.

[M. 19]

3 July 2009

Yes, it makes things somewhat clearer. But there is something I don't understand: Why do I fear the end or even the interruption (by narcosis for example) of my life to such a big extent, although I'm so very much dissatisfied with it at the same time? To regard something as Self means to regard it as permanent and *satisfying*, right? But where is this satisfaction? I don't understand why I fear the end of this 'mess' so much. The degree of my fear seems to be totally unrelated to the degree of satisfaction in my life. So I don't understand why I am so afraid. I know *what* I fear, but I don't know *why*. It is completely irrational. I would even prefer going to hell for eternity instead of annihilation, so permanence is far more important to me than happiness. But why? Why is it more desirable for me to exist in a state of eternal pain than to not exist at all? I don't understand this. But I want to understand this. This strong desire seems to stand on its own, but if that were true, no liberation from it would be possible.

Is it possible to say something about that? Is it necessary to understand this desire? I think so. Or am I wrong?

[N. 17]

8 July 2009

You fear the cessation of existence because you are still bound by it. Although your reason clearly tells you that the life is unsatisfactory, it is not on the level of that intellectual reasoning that our attachment abides. It is craving for being (*bhava-taṇhā*) or craving for non-being (*vibhava-taṇhā*), but nevertheless both of them are *confirming* that very being, i.e. keep you bound to it.

You say: "I know *what* I fear, but I don't know *why*." Although it might seem significant and important to find out "why" things are the way they are, I would like to draw your attention to the following instead: the craving will *always* find a way of expressing itself, and that way will *always* appear as very important and urgent. So if it's not "what," it will be "why," or perhaps "how," etc. As Ven. Ñāṇavīra said, the Buddha's teaching will not give you an answer to those urgent questions, but what it can do is

take you to the place where all of those questions will cease to oppress you. However, that doesn't mean you should stop asking those questions, or find some pleasing answers. On the contrary—if anything, one should keep them in front of oneself, urgent and pressing as they are, *because* that is the only way for one to make, and continue making, the real effort towards overcoming them. Don't hope for the answer which will sort things out, but don't ignore the questions either, because only with their constant presence will you be able to find a place where their pressure cannot reach you. The questions might keep coming even then, but you will know the way to escape their grip and you will clearly see where the problem lies—in *not seeing suffering* in its appearance, rather than trying to find an answer or justification for it.

You ask further: “This strong desire seems to stand on its own, but if that were true, no liberation from it would be possible. Is it possible to say something about that? Is it necessary to understand this desire?”

It is necessary to understand the nature of desire, but we have to clarify what do you mean by “understanding it.” If by that you think of “finding an answer to it,” or “explaining it,” then you won't reach an end to it ever, since there is no *explanation* to be found for a desire (of course, a desire is directly determined and dependent upon the presence of *avijjā*, but this can either be seen or not, never explained). You might find a plausible explanation for desiring something, yet the desire will still be there, which simply means that the understanding of it has to take place on a different level altogether. So rather than finding a reason, one has to find a way of extinguishing it, which is, as we often read, purifying the precepts and pondering on the Teaching. One has to “dry oneself out” from the sensuality and wrong livelihood, because even with an understanding of the Buddha's words, those words cannot apply if there is no appropriate basis for them (remember the simile of a man trying to light the fire with the wet sappy piece of wood, while he is still in the water. Even with the dry wood he won't be able to light it, unless he comes out of the water and completely dries himself out). The ‘dryer’ you are, the less pressure you are going to feel when those deeply-rooted questions of existence come up, and when they do, you will be able to see the real reason for their presence, which is to *oppress* you (i.e. cause suffering), rather than to require an answer. When you see them as

suffering, you will see the existence as suffering too, and then you will really know what is meant by it, and consequently know the way out of it too.

[M. 20]

9 July 2009

Yes, what you say makes sense to me. You wrote: “... and you will clearly see where the problem lies—in *not seeing suffering* in its appearance, rather than trying to find an answer or justification for it.” What exactly does it mean to see suffering in its appearance? In an earlier letter you said: “Try seeing the suffering *in* your experience, the suffering in itself, not dependent upon the external causes and perceptions.” Is this what is meant? If, for example, a strong fear of death arises, do I have to look at the emotion of fear itself instead of the accompanying thoughts?

[N. 18]

15 July 2009

“Seeing suffering in its appearance” means seeing it as a noble truth. Many different things can be the reason of one’s suffering, and all of those things are indeed (but only in a certain sense) a *cause* of suffering. However, only one thing is the cause of suffering in the sense the Buddha taught, and that thing is *craving* (*taṇhā*). All of the other things are causes and reasons of one’s *dukkha* in a *linear* way, that is *kālika*. Those things can come and go, they can sometimes cause pain and sometimes pleasure, depending on one’s attitudes and desires. It is only for *taṇhā* that it can be said that it is the most immediate, consistent and present cause of one’s suffering. The experience of craving is *always* unpleasant. When *craving* is present, *suffering* is present too. There can be no craving without suffering; nor can there be any suffering without craving. Suffering is the result of craving, not the one which follows. It is the one which is there simultaneously and as soon as craving stops, the suffering ceases altogether.

Thus one can look for this and that in this world and in one’s experience to be the excuse for his suffering. One can also deal with those things which appear to be the cause of one’s pain, and indeed the pain can

sometimes disappear on account of it. (Strictly speaking, if one's pain disappears, it is because one has stopped craving for that thing.) However, by any of these actions one will never *see the suffering*, as it is, in a phenomenological way. If one does succeed in seeing suffering, that person will inevitably see the craving as its cause, see the disappearance of craving as its cessation, and also see the way to be followed for the complete cessation of it. This is what I meant by saying “seeing suffering in its appearance”—surmounting the apparent causes of it (not ignoring them), and seeing what is that within this experience which *is present*, on account of which I *presently suffer*? If you see that cause, you will see how to abandon it.

Your question “If, for example, a strong fear of death arises, I have to look at the emotion of fear itself instead of the accompanying thoughts?” should be answered in the light of the above comments. Accompanying thoughts can be products and causes of your fear (by fueling it), but try looking for a reason and seeing *why* that fear is unpleasant. The Suttas can tell you that it is because of craving, but in order to really understand that you will have to *see it*, rather than formulating an explanation in which craving will nicely fit as a cause of one's misery (we are all prone to doing this, to different extents). In a phenomenological sense, look for the movements of your mind *towards* the pleasure and *away* from pain and then try refining them. The very first step of refining those movements is keeping the precepts and restraining one's actions (speech and thoughts are about to follow).

Let me know how this strikes you, especially if I didn't sound too clear, since these topics can appear (and sometimes are) very obscure.

[M. 21]

19 July 2009

You wrote: “In a phenomenological sense—look for the movements of your mind *towards* the pleasure and *away* from pain, and then try refining them.” Is craving (*taṇhā*) that movement of the mind (of attention?) *towards* the pleasure and *away* from pain?

One of the first things I do every day after waking up in the morning is to remember the precepts and why I should keep them. With precepts I

mean the “Right speech” and “Right action” part of the Noble Eightfold Path plus abstaining from intoxicants. I also make donations at least once a month. Since I do this, some things changed for the better, even my dreams (I often dream that I fly up into a golden glowing sky and over beautiful landscapes, accompanied by heavenly music). At least I can say that my fear of death is not due to (moral) remorse, albeit I have done some evil things in this life. But their pressure on me becomes less and less. But I know that *dāna* and *sīla* alone will not solve my problem. They lead ‘upwards’ but not ‘outwards’.

More than once I tried to live sexually abstinent. But I always lost the fight. I think the problem is that there is not much pleasure for me in the ‘spiritual life’. It appears like hard work with no noteworthy results. But I also see the suffering in sexuality and many other things. But if no other/better things are available, it is hard to resist.

I noticed that it is much easier for me to be mindful of the breath when I don’t observe it at a certain spot. Is it necessary to focus on the nostrils? I think Bhante Ñāṇavīra said so, but I can’t do it that way. I know there is a debate about this. I don’t want to waste my time with a wrong method. I need to calm down, there is too much restlessness in my (emotional) life. And I hope that *ānāpānasati* will help me, but I can do it only the aforementioned way.

[N. 19]

29 July 2009

Yes, it can be said that the craving is that movement of ‘leaning’ of the mind towards pleasure, away from pain. Attention is more like a movement *within* that ‘leaning’. However, this is a subject on its own.

It is good that you see the importance of *sīla* in your practice. Don’t expect it to be perfect from the start, but nevertheless keep striving to make it so. Sexual desire is a strong obstacle indeed, so if the full celibacy proves too difficult, start with abstinence from the wrong sexual behaviour, as described by the third precept for laypeople. After that you can start practising further restraint. It is always good to remember the simile of the wet sappy piece of wood which cannot be used to light the fire as long as it’s not dried out. That is where the importance of restraint

lies, only once one's thoughts are 'dried' of sensuality, the Buddha's Teaching *can apply*. The drier the thoughts, the deeper the insights.

I am aware that there are many meditation 'techniques' around, and that people place much importance on how to do them 'properly'. I personally tend not to follow any of them. If you can remember, in one of my reply posts to you at Ñāṇavīra Thera forum pages, I quoted Ajahn Chah's description of his way of meditating in the forest (observing his thoughts and not following them) and that's all that there is to it (but of course this doesn't mean that it is easy, or that it doesn't require discipline or repetition). If one wants to do the meditation properly, one must always bear in mind the main purpose for doing it, that is—*mindfulness*. Whether you are watching your breath, body or thoughts, you are (supposed to be) developing mindfulness, and only once you are established in the mindful attitude, you will be able to give rise to *samādhi*, which is nothing but that 'firmness' of a *mindful mind*. Usually people perceive *samādhi* as some sort of one-pointedness, where a mind is concentrated into one point on account of which everything else gets shut out, so one is not being affected by it. Needless to say this is completely wrong; *samādhi* is indeed one-pointedness, no dispute about that, and the mind is concentrated into one point which *contains everything else*, not excludes, and then one cannot be affected by it (because one has surmounted everything). Thus, whether it is *ānāpānasati* or something else, it is developing of mindfulness that is the priority. You don't need any 'instructions' in order to sit and breathe, do you? You don't need any instructions in order to be aware that you are breathing, no? You don't need any instructions to realize that you wandered off? Well, this kind of attitude, joined with discipline and a desire to understand suffering contained in being, is all that you need in order to meditate. Once you get confident in this, you will also see in what way the Buddha praised *ānāpānasati* as a best object of meditation, and that way is something very different from all modern and commentarial explanations of it. If this might help (or perhaps it will confuse you): in a phenomenological sense, breathing is a very *neutral thing*, yet at the same time it *involves action*, thus it is a perfect thing to use in order to understand the root of one's actions in general, and the way how to put an end to them (and suffering); plus,

that kind of perception of breathing gives rise to a bodily pleasure, which is not partaking in sensuality.

[M. 22]

29 July 2009

What you say about meditation is very helpful, because I was still influenced by the thought that meditation is mainly about bodily posture and the application of a certain technique for a certain amount of time each day. But I realize more and more that meditation is not that kind of rigid and even artificial exercise in sitting or walking and concentrating at one point, trying to think nothing and exclude everything else. After all, one has to face and understand one's own existence/suffering and not to block it out.

[M. 23]

16 September 2009

I would like to ask some more questions. I hope this is okay with you.

My first question is about sense restraint or guarding the senses in daily life. How is it properly done? There are so many external stimuli and opportunities for distraction. Does it mean to avoid them as far as possible? Does it mean not to pay attention or not to think about them beyond a certain point? The computer and the Internet for example play a big role in my life. Pleasurable distractions are just a 'click' away: games, pictures, movies, music, chats, etc. at any time of the day. I don't feel concerned about my morality but I see that I waste too much of my time with these things. They occupy a lot of my thoughts. But I can't resist them for very long. Without those distractions my life is so gray and boring that I just can't stand it. But I see harm in wasting so much time that way. I wrote that I don't want to die as a *puthujjana*. But what am I actually doing for it? It's not that I am not aware of the problem. I think a lot about that. But I don't see a practicable solution. It feels that I need some kind of 'breakthrough' in order to change my life. When I sit down for meditation (provided I can overcome the resistance to do it) there is either that boredom or (which is worse than boredom) the fear of

becoming mad in the process, because there is already so much fear in my life. I don't want to fuel that.

My second question is about a passage in one of your letters regarding one-pointedness. What is meant by “contains everything else”? And is there a possibility to meditate wrong in the sense that (apart from the “one point”) everything else gets shut indeed? If yes, how to avoid that?

[N. 20]

18 September 2009

Yes, sometimes sense restraint is practised simply by avoiding the tempting objects, i.e. not exposing yourself to them. And yes, on some other occasions you just have to be able to endure the saying of “no.” I know how enchanting the internet can be, simply because, as you say, things are only a click away. However, if you train yourself in seeing the real danger in those distractions (danger for your practice and freedom from suffering), even “only one click away” can mean a lot to lose, and then it won't be so easy to give in as before. Also, you can try arranging your daily activities whereby you won't be able to spend too much time in front of the computer. There are many things which one can do, but the most important of all of them is to bear one's priorities in mind and willingly *work through the pain* of restraint. It won't be always that difficult, but that is only known when one has gone through it.

Further you ask: “What is meant by ‘contains everything else’?” What I meant to say in that letter is that, rather than focusing so hard on a point which will make you *ignore* the thoughts (whereby one would fall into some sort of peaceful oblivion), try to focus on a point which *encompasses* all of the thoughts, includes them all. By doing so a person moves out of their range, so thoughts cannot touch him (as long as his *samādhi* lasts, of course). This is achieved through refining one's capacities of mindfulness, since any *samādhi* which is not *mindful samādhi* is wrong *samādhi*. Needless to say, there is nothing to it but hard and repetitious work (which can also be pleasant, when one starts to realize the benefits of mental seclusion—*cittaviveka*).

If you are concerned about falling into wrong *samādhi* without knowing that you are doing so, when you meditate make sure that you don't lose

your mindfulness, whether general (of a fact that you are sitting and meditating), or more particular of your meditation object (e.g. breath). Another point which you can try and investigate while you sit, are your own feelings. What are they like at the moment. You don't have to think much about this and label them "pleasant," "unpleasant," etc. Just sit and be *aware* how you feel, *while* you are mindful of your breath. The point is to keep your meditation 'alive' (aware), and to learn how that when you are not doing so, you can easily come back without having to start from the beginning (i.e. thoughts in unawareness will affect you less and less). The important point is that mindfulness you acquire in *samādhi* should be cultivated at all times, not just when you sit down and meditate.

[M. 24]

18 September 2009

I hope that I understand this correctly. To be mindful of the breath doesn't mean to become totally absorbed in the breath and to forget everything else but to stay aware/awake of the fact of what one is actually doing, or how one feels or what one thinks during the meditation, i.e. while being mindful of the breath? Is this correct? It seems that the function of the breath is more a reminder or an anchor to stay aware/awake/not-to-forget instead of an-object-for-a-concentration/exclusion-exercise. Please correct me if I'm wrong.

Yes, indeed you are right. It is learning how to *act* mindfully (and by doing so eventually see the root of action). Breathing is the most *neutral* type of action one can engage in, plus it is very pleasant and brings many other wholesome results. That is why the Buddha singled it out as the foremost object of *samādhi*. (If you remember, that happened after the Buddha instructed monks to meditate on death [*māraṇusati*]. The Buddha left on retreat for a few months and when he came back he saw that half of the monks were missing. After Ānanda told him that many of them, due to intense contemplation of death, had committed suicide because they were too disgusted with their bodies and lives, the Buddha gave a discourse on mindfulness of breathing and praising its benefits.)¹⁴ This means that no matter how far you pursue the contemplation of breathing, if you are doing it right, there can be *no negative* results, which is not the case with *māraṇusati* (which is also a very good object of meditation, but one has to be very careful to get it right).

So, in order to meditate on breathing—breathe... and be mindful of it. Try seeing how it is that breathing (which does not require any apparent effort) is an action. (People think there is a ‘centre’ in your brain because of which you breathe, thus you are actually *not responsible* for it. As Ven. Ñāṇavīra simply said, we breathe because not-breathing is too *unpleasant*.) In meditation it comes down to refining your attention until you can breathe without having to force yourself to do so, and without forgetting that you are breathing, and then when thoughts come up you can see them as they are, since your focus remains on what you are doing, namely that *breathing*. This is of course an ideal situation, in order to get there you will have to keep balancing from being aware of the breath to getting lost in thoughts, until eventually you can *think your breathing* (cf. Ānāpānasati Sutta),¹⁵ which is nothing extraordinary, just an awareness of breath on a phenomenological level.

[M. 25]

26 September 2009

Thank you for your interesting answer. I never read/thought about the mindfulness of breathing that way. Is it also recommendable to be mindful of the breath outside the time of formal sitting? I become aware of the breath spontaneously from time to time and in such cases it's like an invitation, because I don't have to force myself very much then.

[N. 22]

2 October 2009

You can be mindful of the breath outside the formal sitting, but you probably won't be able to maintain the same quality of awareness, since the breath is a very subtle thing. That's not really a problem since you can be equally mindful of more perceivable objects like the body, body postures, etc. It is very important to bear in mind that whether you are sitting or not, what you are supposed to be trying to do is to *learn* how to be mindful, since it is the *mindfulness* that is absolutely necessary for obtaining knowledge-and-vision. The best way is, as you are probably aware, through repetitive practice, which can be done either in sitting or walking meditation. When you are not meditating, you can try and maintain the best possible level of awareness. When you gradually learn what mindfulness is, and how to be mindful, you won't require so much effort in order to bring it to mind, and it will be much more difficult to lose it, once it is established.

[M. 26]

2 October 2009

Is it possible for you to explain the practice of *mettā bhāvanā*? Bhante Ñāṇavīra wrote in one of his letters:

“If you found *mettā bhāvanā* relatively easy, it is quite possible that you were doing it wrong (*mettā bhāvanā* is notoriously easy to misconceive)...”¹⁶

From this utterance I draw the conclusion that some or many of the available instructions for this kind of meditation are wrong too. But how is it properly done?

I more or less ignored *mettā bhāvanā* up to now, because it doesn't seem so related to insight at first, but the more I think about it, the more important it seems to me to have *mettā*. In one of your last letters you wrote that *ānāpānasati* has no negative results if one is doing it rightly. It seems to me that this also applies to *mettā bhāvanā*. And whenever I had short glimpses of what I think was *mettā* I felt happy right at that moment.

[N. 23]

9 October 2009

Indeed *mettā bhāvanā* is probably the most misconceived practice today. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the common interpretation of 'spreading' or 'radiating' "beams" of loving-kindness to people. It is certainly a way of *intentionally modifying* the sense of *others* within the experience, by removing the desire and aversion from it, not by visualizing smiles on everyone's face. On www.nanavira.org I think you can find Ven. Ñāṇavīra's essay, written in response to Mr. Baptist's article on the four *brahmāviharas*. Although this essay is classified as an 'early writing', it is still very useful and informative.¹⁷

In one of the Early Letters, Ven. Ñāṇavīra mentioned to Ven. Ñāṇamoli that *mettā* practice means re-molding one's being-for-others (Sartre's term). This is enough to rule out the notion of shallow thoughts of love and kindness towards the whole of humanity (no doubt even these thoughts are very pleasant and fulfilling, but they are not *mettā bhāvanā*). The real loving-kindness and compassion are the ones found in the Buddha and *arahats*, that is, the ones who are aiming at the welfare of others by seeing the bigger picture, which those beings don't see. It is similar to the compassion of a doctor where the treatment is directly opposed to the patient's wishes and desires. The doctor sees further than the patient and because of that he knows what kind of actions will cure him in the long run. If a patient has trust in his doctor he will do what he says, until he starts seeing the benefits for himself (and at that point the

patient's trust is replaced by confidence, since now he can see the results for himself).

So practising *mettā* means nothing but developing this bigger picture, which not only will help others, it will help oneself too (in terms of surmounting greed, aversion and delusion). When this attitude is thoroughly established, those things *are not able to enter* one's mind (aversion in particular). To illustrate this, you might remember the simile found in the Suttas (regarding mindfulness), where the mindful mind is compared to a heated pot, where if the water drops it evaporates immediately. The same applies to a mind established in *mettā*, any angry or aversive thoughts cannot linger, since they are directly opposed to *mettā*. Also, in this practice, one ceases to regard others as firmly established 'selves', or rather, the sense of 'self' in regard to oneself and others becomes less impenetrable and firm.

In terms of your own practice, continue it by all means, and at the same time bear in mind the things I mentioned above. *Mettā* requires a lot of repetitive effort, like everything else, but the benefits are great as well. However, rather than focusing on happiness which arises in that practice (and which should arise, and there is no problem with it), focus on the understanding of that kind of experience instead. In that way you won't become attached to happiness and, at the same time, you will be able to look for that bigger picture I was talking about.

[M. 27]

13 October 2009

You wrote about loving-kindness and compassion as "aiming at the welfare of others by seeing the bigger picture." I find that description very nice and useful, because it shows the relation of *mettā*/compassion and understanding, so the "aiming at the welfare" is not misunderstood like in some ideologies—the real socialism of the former Eastern bloc for example.

I would like to ask you another question, which is related. How important is the physical presence of other people for the practice of *sīla*? Most of the time I live alone, so most of my 'practice' actually consists of *thinking* about keeping the precepts. Every morning I renew my 'good

intentions' by reciting the precepts in my mind and by thinking about the reasons to keep them. The positive results are obvious when I interact with others, but how important is this real interaction? My question is mainly related to *kamma-vipāka* and the afterlife. Is the presence of temptations necessary in order to make keeping the precepts count? Is it enough to be someone who *would not* break the precepts (whether opportunities are present or not) in order to keep the precepts, or must the opportunity for breaking the precepts somehow be present in order to make keeping the precepts count (for the afterlife for example)?

[N. 24]

23 October 2009

The presence of others is not necessary in order to keep *sīla*. It can certainly *test* your virtue, but that doesn't mean that you should try exposing yourself to it in order to prove your own purity to yourself. Even we, as monks, have quite a few rules which are not aiming at dealing with temptations but rather with *preventing* them, and that is where the wisdom lies. As long as you are clear with yourself regarding the precepts, that's all that it takes, and if you keep them strictly, the temptations *will* come, in one form or the other. It is not necessary (and it can be even dangerous to your *sīla*) if you keep looking for the "positive results" you mentioned. The purpose of virtue is not the virtue itself, it is to create the grounds for your knowledge to apply, and for that, *just* keeping that virtue, whether with others or alone, is sufficient.

You ask: "Is the presence of temptations necessary in order to make keeping the precepts count?" I think that you are making a mistake here in equating *kamma*, action, with *bodily action* only (or perhaps with verbal too). Mental action can be bad too, if not restrained, and it can also lead to committing other unwholesome actions as well. The fact that one is someone who *would not* break the precepts, whether alone or with others, is enough in terms of keeping them, because knowing that you wouldn't break the precepts, regardless of circumstances, is possible only if the mind is already restrained (i.e. mental action). If the mind is not under any amount of control, then indeed keeping the other precepts would depend solely on circumstances (i.e. presence or absence of temptations)

and that can't be called 'keeping' at all. As I mention above, staying away from opportunities to break the precepts means practising wisdom, and that involves nothing else but the mental restraint I talked about. Restraining one's mind can prevent one from ending up in situations which can or will compromise one's *sīla*.

[M. 28]

26 October 2009

Yes, it seems that I partly equated *kamma* with bodily/verbal action only. I was (and still am) ill for the last two weeks. A lot of fear came up again, often culminating in panic attacks leading to exhaustion and thereby to new panic attacks etc. It is really hell on earth. Sometimes it is enough to just realize that I exist, in order to trigger a new panic attack. Just 'being' scares me. I don't know how to describe this properly, but I think most people have a feeling of 'familiarity' and 'security' with their selves or with 'reality'. But I lack that very often. It is like realizing that all this is built on nothing. It feels so unjustified and so insecure that I have the feeling that it could vanish any moment. And then the panic comes up, especially if my body is already in bad shape. This 'being a self' is the abyss for me, which Bhante Ñāṇavīra mentioned. The day I fully realized my own existence—its groundlessness and its vulnerability—was the day my anxiety disorder was born.

I once read (I don't remember where it was) that the Buddha only taught for mentally and emotionally healthy/stable people. And that mentally/emotionally ill people first need to get 'normal' in order to be ready for the teachings. What do you think about this? Sometimes I fear that this might be true and that I am not 'normal' enough, because I am in fact so paralyzed by my anxiety and fear that I'm unable to lead a normal life (and a monk's life too). But on the other hand: if I were 'normal' I would not be interested in the Buddha's Teaching or at least not in the way I am. My problem (= my Self) is so big that I want to solve it once and for all. And the Buddha's Teaching seems to be the only way.

Your observation is very correct. Most of the people do establish themselves in this world with that sense of familiarity, and that is what enables them to go through life. I think that I can only advise you to practice meditation regularly. If you put a lot of effort into it, your mind will eventually grow stronger, so when the feelings of panic and nothingness come up you won't be too swayed by them. Needless to say those feelings will come up, not just for you, but for everyone, simply because they *represent the true nature* of things—utter gratuitousness and lack of mastery over one's experience.

You say: "I once read (I don't remember where it was) that the Buddha only taught for mentally and emotionally healthy/stable people." This cannot be further from the truth. As you already pointed out, 'normal people' don't feel the need to practise the Teaching, since they are complacent with their own existence. Now, indeed, someone completely without any control over actions by body, speech and mind will not be capable of practicing the Dhamma, and for those cases it could be said that they have to become 'normal' in order to start. But 'normal' here doesn't mean anything else but 'reasonable' and aware of one's actions and their consequences. As long as one is able to rationally grasp the concept of precepts (and to follow them of course) and to understand the instructions the Buddha left for us, that is all that is needed in order to start practising. I wouldn't be too concerned with what the others say; as Ven. Ñāṇavīra pointed out, people want their Dhamma on easier terms, and today that unfortunately means almost everyone. For such people practising the Dhamma, in order to free yourself from the anxiety, makes no sense. As a matter of fact, now that I mentioned that, the essential aim of the Teaching is to free one from that very *anxiety*, which is *the root* of every 'mental illness'; if one's lack of stability and familiarity (due to that 'illness') is not depriving him of reason, as already mentioned above, such a person should actually consider himself in a better position than the rest (but less comfortable), since that very 'illness' prevents him from falling to complacency, and instead urges him to go on. As the Suttas often say:

“He holds to nothing in the world; not holding, he is not anxious; not being anxious he individually becomes extinct”¹⁸

Thus, in order to see one's holding, one *has to* become aware of the underlying anxiety (how much he is going to be affected by it, depends on the strength of his mental composure). The fact that most people dedicate their lives in order to avoid anxiety and reduce the encounters with it to a bare minimum, means that they are going in directly the opposite direction than the one required by the Buddha's Teaching.

As always, I hope this helps in one way or another. The business of living is hard, especially for someone who is striving to become an authentic individual, then it becomes a 24/7 non-optional task. However, rather than giving in to fear regarding this prospect, think of the freedom which can be gained by it, freedom which nothing in this world can surpass.

[M. 29]

30 October 2009

Thank you for your clear and helpful answer. You strengthened my belief that I am on the right track with my problem. I will follow your advice and meditate regularly and also more often. That was my idea too. If I would die with the current amount of anxiety, I would have lived in vain. So at least I cannot complain about the lack of a life-task.

1. Ajahn Chah (1918-1992) was an influential Dhamma teacher in the Thai Forest Tradition.
2. Ajahn Chah, *Everything is Teaching Us*, Bodhivana Monastery, 2004, p. 44.
3. Sister Vajirā (1928-1991) was a German nun (*dasa sīla upāsikā*) who apparently attained stream-entry, *sotāpatti*. The letters have been published as *The Letters of Sister Vajirā* by Path Press Publications, 2010.
4. Ajahn Chah, *Food For The Heart*: Wisdom Publications, 2002, p. 193.
5. See N.6.: “I took the existence in a ‘pregnant sense’, i.e. as being or *bhava*.”
6. ‘What is enlightenment, no, I mean really, like what is it?’ (essay) by Steven Norquist from *Haunted Universe, The True Knowledge of Enlightenment*: BookSurge Publishing, 2009.
7. *CtP*, pp. 468-9.
8. *CtP*, p. 352.
9. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, 5.633.
10. *NoD*, PHASSA.
11. *StP*, p. 259.
12. *StP*, p. 260.
13. *SV*. 14, p. 71.
14. *SN* 54:9.
15. *MN* 118.
16. *CtP*, p. 228.
17. Also published in *StP*, pp. 605-10.
18. *DN* 15.

2010

[M. 30]

19 February 2010

I would like to ask you another question if possible. Is it possible to give a description of *attā* or self in a phenomenological way? I am aware that the possible 'content' of *attā* are the five aggregates. But what exactly does it mean (in terms of one's own experience) to regard a thing as 'me' or 'mine' or 'for me'?

At the moment it seems to me that regarding a thing as 'me' or 'mine' is nothing but the 'emotional weight' of that thing. If a thing doesn't matter at all (emotionally), it has nothing to do with 'me' and is not 'mine'. So in a sense 'caring about a thing' makes it 'my thing' and 'not caring about that thing' leaves the thing as just the thing (with no emotional weight).

I see that the only problem is the emotional life, i.e. that I cannot remain calm. I perceive a thing, an emotion is aroused and now that thing is 'impressive' and 'matters'. If that were not the case, there would be only peace.

I would like to hear your answer/comment on 'self' (if possible). Thank you!

[N. 26]

22 February 2010

You are somewhat correct in saying that regarding a thing as ‘mine’ is the “emotional weight” of that thing. The point is that when something is ‘mine’ there is an *affective* (emotional) bond with that thing. The more a thing is yours, the more you are going to be attached to it. This however works both ways, a thing is ‘mine’, therefore it carries emotional significance, but then also *because* of that emotional significance (i.e. pleasure) a thing is *regarded* as ‘mine’. If a thing is not pleasant (in any way), it has no real importance for me, therefore I won’t regard it as ‘me’.

It is important however to distinguish the fact that a *puthujjana*’s *feeling* is a part of the appropriated experience as such, it is not the appropriation itself. (An *arahat* still has feelings but they are completely devoid of any ‘personal’ significance whatsoever.) So, in order to see the appropriation, you must not dismiss or negate feelings towards things completely, since they are not the problem. In order to see the appropriation you must:

“In pleasant feeling abandon tendency to lust (towards that pleasant feeling); in unpleasant feeling abandon tendency to aversion (towards that unpleasant feeling); in neutral feeling abandon tendency to ignorance (towards that neutral feeling).”¹⁹

In other words you must see that feelings are part of things not yourself, see their impermanence as such and as a result you will cease to regard them as ‘yours’, thus when a thing comes to an end you will not be affected by that, regardless of the fact whether the thing was pleasant, painful or neutral.

[M. 31]

23 February 2010

It seems that I have trouble to clearly distinguish between feeling and lust/aversion. Aren’t lust and aversion felt too? When is it mere feeling and when is it lust or aversion?

[N. 27]

1 March 2010

It's understandable that you have troubles distinguishing feeling from lust and aversion since it is not a small thing to be able to do so. Nevertheless, the distinction is crucial and lies on a level of being able to distinguish (understand) the five aggregates from the five-holding-aggregates. Only then will you be able to see the nature of your *holding* (which is a result of desire and lust in regard to the five aggregates). I'm sure you've seen in the Suttas²⁰ that holding is not the five aggregates, but there is no holding apart from them. It is the desire-and-lust in regard to the five aggregates that holding is there.

As long as one is not an *arahat* there will be (some) lust, aversion and delusion accompanying every pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feeling. Lust and aversion are not felt; it is feeling that you feel, lust and aversion *underlie* it (*anussaya*). That's why I said that you must neither follow (indulge) nor deny (refuse) your respective feelings. Only *while they are present* (i.e. while you *feel*) will you be able to practise mindfulness over them, and hopefully see the underlying tendencies within that experience and then, of course, give them up.

[M. 32]

2 March 2010

But what about the so called 'mental feelings'? If I remember correctly, there is a Sutta which says that the *puthujjana* is hit by two arrows: bodily feeling plus mental feeling, but the *arahat* is only hit by one arrow, i.e. bodily feeling. Therefore it seems to me that the *arahat* no longer has mental feelings (what I called 'emotions' in a former letter). So my question is: Are there feelings which depend on lust and aversion?

I was once a follower of the interpretation of Paul Debes (like Sister Vajirā, I think) but I always had doubts. Mr. Debes taught that all feelings (at least the mental ones) are the response of "hidden tendencies" to experience. For example: I *like* a certain kind of music and *therefore* a pleasant feeling arises when I hear it, or an unpleasant feeling if I hear a music which is *contrary to what I like* etc. *Taṇhā* (according to Mr. Debes) is just the "becoming aware" of that "hidden tendency" or the liking and

disliking due to the arising of that feeling. But I have some kind of allergy against the postulation of 'hidden entities' or 'forces' which shall explain the existence of phenomena, because one can never be sure if they really exist. There is also the problem that (according to my understanding) Mr. Debes somehow *inverts* the relation of feeling and craving, because he says that feeling depends on (hidden) likings and dislikings, whereas the Suttas seem to say that liking and disliking depend on feeling. Mr. Debes tries to explain *why* things are pleasant or unpleasant and he says that this is due to the tendencies. Somehow that makes sense. But on the other hand: If there is no feeling (pleasant or unpleasant) in the first place, how should likings or dislikings arise?

So the relation between feeling and craving is still not clear. It seems that some feelings would not arise without craving. But in such a case feelings were dependent on craving, which is contrary to what is said in the 'formula' of dependent origination or some other contexts in the Suttas. Is it possible for you to shed some light on this problem?

I have already finished the letter, but I have to insert an additional thought here: If *dukkha* is feeling and if the cause of *dukkha* is craving then feeling depends on craving, but why is it said that craving depends on feeling (dependent origination etc.)? I don't understand this. It seems to be a contradiction.

[N. 28]

12 March 2010

I'll try and clarify the points you raise.

This Sutta should be understood in the sense that, for an *arahat*, feelings which arise as a result of not knowing the way out of feelings are non-existent. Those mental feelings are extinguished in him, unlike in a *puthujjana* who doesn't know the escape from feelings, so, when hit by one, his mind starts grieving and as a result he is hit by *another* feeling. That 'another' feeling is directly dependent upon ignorance (of the escape from suffering, i.e. four noble truths). It is true that craving depends upon feeling, in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* sense, but from a different point of view, craving is responsible for maintaining the ignorance, through desire-and-

lust, so in that sense feeling depends upon it (this is different from the *paṭiccasamuppāda* approach).

It is an interesting interpretation, the one you mention from Paul Debes, but that's all there is to it—it is *an interpretation*, not a description of the actual state of affairs, which tells me that Mr. Debes didn't see those things for himself. It is very good that you say that Mr. Debes 'inverts' the relation of feeling and craving, since the 'inversion' is one of the main characteristics of (any) wrong view. (Remember the utterances of those who understood the Buddha—like turning right that which was upside down, like putting first that which was before second.) The right order of important phenomenological things is absolutely crucial for understanding. Tendencies (*anusaya*) are far less 'conscious' than what Mr. Debes supposes, so "just becoming aware" of them will not be enough I'm afraid. As far as I can gather from your paragraph (I have never read Paul Debes), it seems that he confuses "liking," a product of long unquestioned and unrestrained giving-in to our pleasant feelings (i.e. preferences), with the existential *taṇhā* (far more primordial than that). Indeed there are no preferences without *taṇhā* (note: this doesn't mean that there are no intentions and choice in an *arahat*), but in order to uproot our craving we have to hit much deeper than our superficial liking and disliking of things. 'Hidden' tendencies are nothing but our first reaction to feelings (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral) which were never understood. If a person would abandon desire for more pleasure in pleasant feeling (note: not the actual pleasant feeling), the *desire* for less pain in painful feeling, and the *desire* for ignorance in neutral feeling, those tendencies would eventually drain away in him and he would be completely free from suffering.

[M. 33]

13 March 2010

It was helpful again and answers my question with regard to the mentioned Sutta. But it would still be an exaggeration to say that the whole matter (feeling and craving) is now 'clear' to me (which certainly was not expected).

Paul Debes laid much emphasis on the afterlife. He was of the opinion that the way to liberation is a 'crawler lane' and that in order to understand the value of *nibbāna* one has to understand our endless and pointless journey in *saṃsāra* first. Maybe that was the main reason for me to turn away.

Did you ever read Mr. Wettimuny's last book *The Buddha's Teaching And the Ambiguity of Existence*? I was lucky to obtain one example via an antiquarian bookshop, since it is out of print. I just began reading it today and I'm very impressed.

[N. 29]

22 March 2010

I read Mr. Wettimuny's book in question. It was an interesting read indeed, since you don't get to see many books influenced by Ven. Ñāṇavīra's thinking. However, one thing which I was not able to see in that book are Mr. Wettimuny's own views (actually, now that I think of it, there were few), and mostly it was his interpretation (sometimes even verbatim) of Ven. Ñāṇavīra's *Notes on Dhamma* and the letters. Nevertheless, the book was useful, certainly in further polishing up of my own understanding of Ven. Ñāṇavīra.

[M. 34]

23 April 2010

I also want to mention (which I forgot last time) that I am happy that there is such an opportunity to communicate with you. I can say that I benefit from your answers. Their content is often not predictable to me, which is quite different from most other conversations and books. So I can really learn something. At some point it is really hard to find someone who is able to give some advice beyond the usual and already known.

I finished Mr. Wettimuny's book. I think it is certainly one of the few books about the Buddha's Teaching which is actually worth reading. But what you said about Mr. Wettimuny's own views seems to be quite true also. I often observed that people (including me) turn into 'parrots' after being influenced by a certain teaching which fascinates them.

I would like to ask you again some questions regarding the “reality of things.” I have read *The Letters of Sister Vajirā*, but this matter is still not clear to me. In his letter to Mr. Samaratunga from 6 July 1963 (L. 63), Ven. Ñāṇavīra wrote: “The fact is, however, that the notion of Reality concealed behind appearances is quite false.” And in his letter to Mr. Brady from 1 January 1965 (L. 147): “Berkeley’s *esse est percipi* [to be is to be perceived] is, in principle, quite correct.” My problem is that I cannot bring those statements together with:

1) the ‘criticism’ of Sister Vajirā’s response to Mr. Debes’ view that “*rūpa* is perceived/perception” (although I am aware that *rūpa* is the behaviour of appearances and not a ‘perception’);

2) the independence of *rūpa* from *viññāṇa* (except for its presence or existence);

3) the statement that “behaviour takes place whether it is attended to or not—the clock, for example, does not stop when I leave the room” (NoD, NĀMA)

4) the existence of (for example) *āyu-saṅkhāra* ‘below’ our experience.

Regarding 1): If *rūpa* is not a reality concealed behind *saññā*, but only together with *saññā* (as its behaviour), I don’t see any *practical* difference to Mr. Debes’ view that there is no *rūpa* without *saññā*.

Regarding the other points: I cannot imagine any of them without assuming (them as) a reality concealed behind appearances. So I can’t help but see a contradiction.

Is it possible for you to shed some more light on this topic? I have already studied again our earlier correspondence which was sometimes closely related to this topic, but unfortunately I was unable to answer my questions with their help.

The problem with the “notion of Reality behind the appearances” is that it assumes that the appearance is ‘unreal’ or ‘fake’. This is incorrect simply because thinking so prevents one from understanding current experience at all (the five aggregates), and instead falls into one wrong view or the other. Any view that *denies* what is being experienced (whether you actually understand it or not is not of relevance here) shouldn’t be trusted.

The fact that *there is* the perception means that matter *is there*, but that doesn’t mean that the perception is matter or *vice versa*. *Rūpa* exists *outside* the appearance, but *as the appearance* (and both the ‘outside’ *rūpa* and current appearance form *nāmarūpa*, and together with consciousness our experience as a whole). No matter how close you try to get to matter, to see it, to examine it, what you are seeing and examining is a ‘perception’ *in regard* to matter, and that is the only way that those things can relate. A simile might help you understand this better—if you look yourself in the eyes in the mirror, what you are seeing is the perception obviously, but the perception of a form *because of which* you were able to perceive in the first place (i.e. your eye-organs). So you are looking at your eye-organs, but what you see is your perception which *cannot* exist without the *matter* of the eye-organs. To sum this up—one will *never* be able to relate to *rūpa* *without* perception and even thinking of it as ‘independent’, ‘concealed’ or ‘Real’ is actually still *perceiving it*, as imaginary (perception) of course. What one can do is to overcome all assumptions (*upādāna*) whereby *rūpa* will lose any footing needed to establish itself in consciousness.

If you cannot imagine *rūpa* without assuming it as a reality hidden behind the experience, why don’t you include that assumed-hidden-reality-behind-the-experience as a *present part* of the broader experience? Why cling to the current limited experience and struggle with things which seem to appear to be ‘beyond’ it, instead of giving them equal right to exist to the extent they are meant to? If you try this you might see that eventually the contradiction you are referring to will slowly start to fade away.

I have trouble to understand what “*rūpa* exists outside the appearance” means. I regard consciousness as the presence/existence (of a thing). And (according to my understanding) consciousness or presence or existence cannot be separated from appearance (perception). So how can there be presence or existence of *rūpa* outside the appearance? I think the key for the understanding of what you say lies in the second part (underlined), namely that *rūpa* exists outside the appearance, but as the appearance.

But I am unable to bring them together. I think my mistake is that I read your “outside the appearance” as “concealed behind the appearance” and then I have trouble to bring this together with “as the appearance.” Do you agree (that my reading is a mistake)?

You wrote: “To sum this up—one will *never* be able to relate to *rūpa* without perception and even thinking of it as ‘independent’, ‘concealed’ or ‘Real’ is actually still *perceiving it*, as imaginary (perception) of course. What one can do is to overcome all assumptions (*upādāna*) whereby *rūpa* will lose any footing needed to establish itself in consciousness.” I totally agree with that. When I ask myself whether there is a ‘hidden room’ behind a wall, I already have assumed (imagined) the existence of such a room, even in the case that I *deny* its existence (because this denial requires the assumption of existence, otherwise there is nothing to deny). This simile describes my problem quite well. I somehow regard the ‘appearances’ (perceptions) as a ‘wall’. And then I ask myself whether there is something hidden behind it or not. So if you say that “*rūpa* exists *outside* the appearance” I understand or misunderstand that statement in a way as if you have said that there is a ‘hidden room’ behind the ‘wall’. But did you actually want to say/imply that? I’m not sure. Wait... ‘Wall’ already implies the existence of a ‘behind’ (whether it is a ‘room’ or an infinite extension of the material of the wall). But I don’t know whether I must stop seeing appearances as ‘walls’ or not.

While (re)reading this, I remember a statement of yours. I searched in the Ñāṇavīra Thera Dhamma Forum and here it is: “In the strictest sense, *rūpa* on its own is always ‘below’ our experience.” This appears to me like a hint now. Could it be that an ‘independent’ or ‘outside’ or ‘behind’ or ‘beyond’ or ‘below’ or ‘concealed’ is always ‘implied’ by the appearances?

Like ‘wall’ always implies a ‘behind’? Or better: Could it be that *rūpa* or a ‘below-our-experience’ is always implied by the appearance/experience but (as such or in-itself) cannot be found (like consciousness as such cannot be found)?

[N. 31]

10 May 2010

You said: “I think the key for the understanding of what you say lies in the second part (underlined), namely that *rūpa* exists outside the appearance, but as the appearance.” Exactly.

“But I am unable to bring them together. I think my mistake is that I read your “outside the appearance” as “concealed behind the appearance” and then I have trouble to bring this together with “as the appearance.” Do you agree (that my reading is a mistake)?”

Yes, I do agree, but then the fact that you already explained where you are going wrong means that you are not too wrong. You can regard matter as ‘concealed’ behind the appearance, that is not a problem. The problem is what significance it bears on your experience, and which views are formed as a result of it. You don’t have to change and replace the sense of ‘concealment’ which you get when you try to understand the *matter*. What you have to do, as I mentioned earlier on, is *include* it in your present experience, together with that “very apparent and obvious” appearance. You don’t have to force it together, so to speak, with the appearance, and make them into one or similar, just *include* that *unpleasant* sense of concealed matter *as a thing* in your experience. Remember when Sister Vajirā said to Ven. Ñāṇavīra, after attaining to her stream-entry, that the reason which was preventing her from seeing Dhamma was the fact that she was denying the parts of her experience as soon as they would arise, thus not leaving herself a chance to understand them as they are.

Imagined existence of a room is *equally* part of the experience of the room (wall in front of you, the door that leads behind, the significance it might bear, e.g. if it’s your room, or ‘forbidden’ room etc.). In terms of perception, both the wall and your imaginary room are equal parts of the present experience as a whole.

“Could it be that *rūpa* or a ‘below-our-experience’ is always implied by the appearance/experience but (as such or in-itself) cannot be found (like consciousness as such cannot be found)?”

Exactly, well done. The things indeed ‘imply’ the matter, so to speak, and that ‘implication’ is nothing but one of the *intentions* of the thing in itself. And what you say here: “Like ‘wall’ always implies a ‘behind’” refers to the whole experience as a combination of positive and negatives, *dhammā* and *saṅkhārā*. The significance of the wall will be affected by the room ‘behind’—if a room is for example desirable to be in, the wall will be regarded as an obstacle; or if there is a danger inside, the wall is that which represents your safety..., etc., just to give the obvious examples.

Now when that is settled, I would like to just slightly correct you in saying “...is always ‘implied’ by the appearance.” Although I know what you mean, it would be more correct to say that “independent, outside, behind, beyond, below, etc.” are descriptions of matter upon which appearances are directly founded (in the *akālika* sense). The reason why I prefer it over ‘implied’ is because, as I mentioned above, ‘implied’ is more suited for describing intentions (for me at least) and more importantly it subtly gives the existential priority to appearances rather than matter (i.e. it implies the different existential order than the one outlined in the five aggregates). It’s a small issue but can prove very important in outlining the *direction of the things* in our experience.

I see now that one of my mistakes was that I regarded *rūpa* only as *behaviour* of the appearance. But *rūpa* is also *substance*, i.e. *that which appears*. Somehow I blocked that out. What we are conscious of is matter. But the only way to be conscious of matter is to perceive it (including ‘imagination’) as coloured, shaped, sounding, smelling, etc. In other words: When we perceive qualities like colour, shape, odour, etc., we are always conscious of a ‘carrier’ of those qualities, i.e. we are conscious of a ‘substance’ which ‘has’ them and that is *rūpa* or matter. So *rūpa* is not appearance (not colour, not shape, etc.), but *that which appears* (i.e. *that which is or appears as coloured, shaped, etc.*). I think we could also say that our perceptions or appearances are *material*, i.e. *they have substance*, i.e. they are *real*. And that ‘substance’ which makes them ‘real’ is *rūpa*.

I’m still not fully satisfied with what I have written above. While searching for a more adequate way of expressing myself, I stumbled across the following statement regarding one school of the Mahāyāna: “According to the Mādhyamikas, all phenomena are empty of ‘self nature’ or ‘essence’...”²¹ And elsewhere it is said that phenomena do not exist “*from their own side.*”

But now it dawns on me that this “self nature” or “essence” or that existence “from their own side” is the *very nature of rūpa*. Unfortunately the Mahāyāna and maybe also the majority of Theravāda seem to confuse that kind of ‘essence’ or ‘self nature’ with ‘*attā*’ and therefore regard ‘*anattā*’ as lack or absence of such an ‘essence’ of the phenomena which leads them to the conclusion (= confusion) that their experience of phenomena is ‘wrong’, i.e. that the phenomena only appear *as if* existing ‘from their own side’ (or ‘outside’ or ‘independent’ etc.) while ‘in truth’ they are ‘only in the mind’, empty of any ‘self nature’.

Maybe 50% of my suffering is due to my effort to turn things upside down and regard as internal what is external and as external what is internal. Can one succeed without going crazy? I doubt it more and more.

What do you think about my understanding of *rūpa*? You see, I still have to ask.

[N. 32]

17 May 2010

This is quite correct. What is left for you now is to see *consciousness* as ‘outside’ too, being already ‘given’ in the world.

I think your understanding of matter is much clearer, as much as I am able to judge that through your letter. Indeed forcing an existential discrepancy can drive people mad, it comes down to whether a person has enough capacity to hold it (without being destroyed by it), until the escape is finally seen.

When you do contemplate *rūpa*, or any five aggregates, try seeing what is meant by ‘holding’, or ‘assuming’, them. The whole point of this practice is finding the way out of suffering and realizing what it is that we do which keeps causing it.

[M. 37]

21 May 2010

May I ask another question regarding the first part of your answer? You wrote: “What is left for you now is to see consciousness as ‘outside’, being already ‘given’ in the world.” Can you please explain what is meant by “outside” and “already given in the world”? I have problems to apply these terms to consciousness.

Regarding the other parts of your answer, I need a bit more time to clarify my thoughts in order to formulate a clear question (if necessary).

[M. 38]

26 May 2010

After many days of confusion and frustration I have the feeling of being on the right track now. I could summarize my thinking in one sentence: *This individual is not me.*

It seems that the problem is my inability to understand how this individual can be *this* (and not *that*) individual *without being self*. In other words: The inability to distinguish ‘internal and external’ from ‘subject and object’ (‘I and world’). They ‘match’ but they are not the same. And since I identify ‘internal’ with ‘self’ and ‘external’ with ‘others (selves)’, and since *anattā* is not-self, I throw the baby out with the bath water by

denying ‘internal’ and ‘external’ together with ‘self’. What is left then is the hope that the ‘wrong’ experience will follow the ‘right’ view after enough ‘practice’. A futile hope, because experience is never ‘wrong’ (unreal), it just is as it is, and right view will not deny that. There is no need to convert (by practice) the ‘real experience’ into an ‘unreal dream’—unless one wants to end up in the mental hospital. So I can let things be the way they are, but without regarding them as ‘mine’, ‘me’ or ‘my self’. ‘Thingness’ is not ‘self-hood’, i.e. to regard a thing as a ‘substance’ is not to regard it as self. This individual can remain in the world, no need to deny it (or the world or both). But it (they) is (are) *not me*. ‘Internal’ and ‘external’ is just the order of things, the way they group themselves. For example: If there are two individuals and if consciousness is bound to individuals, they must ‘arrange’ themselves as ‘this’ and ‘that’, ‘internal’ and ‘external’. They can’t be both ‘internal’ or both ‘external’, because they are *two*.

My understanding is still shallow, but a bit of my tension is released since I can (at least try to) allow ‘this individual’ to be (including the world it is in) without condemning myself for it. I don’t need to ‘touch’ them (to sweep them out of the way). The ‘horror of annihilation’ whilst thinking about *anattā* in this way is also reduced. And also the denial of ‘others’ (other individuals), which is an obstacle to *mettā*. But there is still a strong tendency to ‘fall back’.

You helped me a lot. I preserved our correspondence. Sometimes the ‘real’ understanding is not possible at the time when a letter arrives.

[N. 33]

28 May 2010

I’m glad to hear that things seem to be getting clearer for you.

You say: “The inability to distinguish ‘internal and external’ from ‘subject and object’ (‘I and world’). They ‘match’ but they are not the same.” Indeed so. They appear as overlapping, which is the main source of one’s confusion. The nature of superimposition—the main power of ignorance, the main tool for liberation.

The denial of present experience is probably the most common problem for us Westerners. It’s probably due to the scientific approach we are so

exposed to, so not before long you end up believing that your experience is not actually what it seems to be and you end up adopting external explanations to interpret it (this can actually be said for any wrong view). When this happens, even a simple phenomenology becomes a tall order. (Hence we needed Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre to clear things up for us.)

I'm not quite sure what you mean here so can you say something more about: "If there are two individuals and if consciousness is bound to individuals, they must 'arrange' themselves as 'this' and 'that', 'internal' and 'external'. They can't be both 'internal' or both 'external', because they are *two*." In any case, make sure that you maintain close observance of that individual that appeared. He, or it, is to be understood thoroughly.

[M. 39]

29 May 2010

The more I think about my statement the more questionable it seems. I'm sorry. My views regarding certain matters are no longer as rigid as before and sometimes they change very rapidly. That statement of mine was related to the problem of plurality of consciousness, i.e. consciousness internal and external. So if there are consciousnesses (of different individuals) there must be a reason why the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking associated to and dependent on *other(s)* bodies are 'not to be found'. In other words: Your consciousness is totally hidden from me. So what is so special about *this* ('my') particular body and *this* ('my') particular consciousness that they are internal while the bodies and consciousness of all other individuals are external? Since 'self' must be discarded by the 'good Buddhist', my *former* answer to this question was: Consciousness does not exist on the level of 'self' and 'others' and 'internal' and 'external', so only this consciousness exists and 'self' and 'others', 'internal' and 'external' only apply to the *content* (*nāmarūpa*) of *this* consciousness but *not to consciousness itself* (which is only the presence of *this* content, i.e. of '*me* in the world'). You certainly remember our correspondence regarding this problem. So I tried a different approach and wrote to you the above mentioned sentence(s):

"'Internal' and 'external' is just the order of things, the way they group themselves. For example: If there are two individuals and if consciousness

is bound to individuals, they must 'arrange' themselves as 'this' and 'that', 'internal' and 'external'. They can't be both 'internal' or both 'external', because they are two."

Alternatively (and in a very loose formulation) I could also say: If only *one* individual would exist in the world, it would be 'me' or 'internal'. But if there are *two* (or more) of them, it would be 'me (internal) and you/others (external)' (and not two times 'me' or two times 'you'). But now it seems to me that this is essentially the same as before, because the 'me' is still 'the only one (who is me)' while the others are always others (who do not exist for themselves as 'I'). It is quite funny (and pointless) that one is able to suffer on account of such questions.

From what you have said so far I guess that my error is to assume the *existence* of consciousness or consciousnesses and then try to explain/interpret my experience based on those assumptions. But it doesn't work. But if I regard consciousness not as existent (*as thing*) but as existence (*of things*), I don't understand how it can be 'internal' or 'external'. Rereading what I have just written, it seems possible to me that I regard consciousness not as presence *of* phenomena but as presence *as* phenomena, i.e. that consciousness is present (exists) *as* the phenomena (as a thing which *is* other things). I think that means that I am still 'holding' or 'assuming' it.

Is there any other way to relate to the consciousnesses of 'others' apart from *assuming* (*imagining*) them as 'things that exist (out there)'? Is there any other way to relate to 'one's own' consciousness apart from *assuming* (*imagining*) it as a 'thing that exists (in here)'?

I'm sorry to write again. I hope this is not a problem for you. Do not hesitate to answer my last letter in case you would like to do so (I'm still interested), but—and this is a new question—is it really necessary to ponder on all these problems and questions? The cessation of suffering—that goal seems so clear and obvious, but it seems to be associated with so much other stuff. I have so many questions, but no answer is satisfying me. There is no end to it. Every answer gives rise to new questions or even the same question again and again. Every explanation seems to be incomplete or faulty in one way or another. One of the most disturbing matters is the self. I have pondered so heavily on it that the term itself is no longer clear or meaningful to me. What does it mean? *I don't know*, despite the fact that I could list you many definitions. 'Self' is devoid of any substantial meaning for me. The same with not-self. Just empty words and definitions—but nothing I actually experience. It is all dry and lifeless. Except for communication, I can no longer make use of the word 'self' or 'not-self'. If people talk/write about 'the self', or even 'the *true* self' I can't follow them anymore. I could only ask them whether they know what they are talking about, since I don't know. Their 'self' might be part of a nice theory, but most certainly not of my experience. When someone holds one of those views about self it might be necessary to destroy it by introducing not-self, but I am not aware of holding any of those self-views that must be destroyed. 'Self' seems to be like an 'alien' from a badly made science-fiction movie. It might nicely fit into that movie but not into real life experience. Something has fallen apart and I am unable to put the parts together again. There is suffering—that is for sure. But 'suffering' is also just a word. Whenever I try to intellectually get hold of 'it', it escapes. No definition, no explanation, no description seems possible without involving a leak. If it fits here, it leaks there, and if it fits there, it leaks here.

Suffering must be the starting point. But is there a way to proceed from there without getting lost in thoughts and theories? Would it be enough to just follow the Buddha's practical instructions and *then* see for oneself (without adopting 'views' about the outcome *beforehand*)? "Do this and observe that and then you will see for yourself." Is that possible? If I am

willing to put the instructions into practice—do I have to adopt any views (aside from the view that putting an end to suffering is possible by following the instructions)?

[N. 34]

4 Jun 2010

You ask: “is it really necessary to ponder on all these problems and questions?” To answer briefly—it is and it isn’t. It is, because without pondering on them one will never look for liberation; it isn’t, simply because asking questions and finding answers will not lead to liberation. To paraphrase Ven. Ñāṇavīra when he quoted the *Six Existentialist Thinkers*²² (in ‘Preface’ of NoD): the purpose of existentialism is not to provide ready-made answers to our existence, it is rather to engage the individual until he *becomes* a question. The Buddha’s teaching then takes that individual to the place where all questions (about self and world) cease. This, again, is not accomplished by giving stock answers, it is rather by extinguishing those very questions, so that they cannot arise any more and when they do, they cannot oppress one any further.

There is no definition of Self. It’s either there (when you appropriate your experience), or not (when you let go of it). If I was in your place, I would try to leave all of the questions as they are, and look behind them for the *intention to solve* them. Are you looking for an answer so that you can replace the unpleasant feeling of an unsolved question? If yes, that is a temporary relief, until the next question comes up. Why don’t you look at the unpleasant feeling itself, regardless of what is there (whether a question or anything else)? Also, do you immediately *assume* that a question *requires* an answer? If you already know enough about the impermanent nature of Self (from the Suttas and Ven. Ñāṇavīra), perhaps it’s time to stop looking for the answers and instead focus on extinguishing the questions; then the things that you learned might become *applicable*. What is more important—to *have answers* or *not to suffer*?

You wrote: “But ‘suffering’ is also just a word. Whenever I try to intellectually get hold of ‘it’, it escapes. No definition, no explanation, no description seems possible without involving a leak. If it fits here, it leaks there, and if it fits there, it leaks here.”

Whenever there is a fit there will be a leak, it's inevitable. Stop trying to fit things for a moment and see what's there. It might give you an opportunity to see why the experience of a 'leak' is suffering.

You asked: "If I am willing to put the instructions into practice—do I have to adopt any views (aside from the view that putting an end to suffering is possible by following the instructions)?"

Views are already there, whether you want to adopt them or not. It's not possible to 'step out' of views and look at them externally without being engaged with them. That's why the only way out is to adopt right views (as you correctly mentioned, i.e. the view that the way out of suffering is possible by following certain instructions, that Self is to be abandoned, etc.), see them for yourself, and then follow them through until all of the views cease. Remember what Ven. Ñāṇavīra said: *avijjā* has to be unscrewed from inside.²³

[M. 41]

4 June 2010

I think that has something to do with the 'assumption' that these questions are legitimate, i.e. that it is necessary to *answer* them in order to make 'progress'. But I think I understand what you mean and that looking for the unpleasant feeling itself is the right thing to do.

You wrote: "Also, do you immediately assume that a question requires an answer?" Yes, or I would rather say that I immediately assume that there is a definite answer which would put the question to rest (if found).

You wrote: "If you already know enough about the impermanent nature of Self (from the Suttas and Ven. Ñāṇavīra), perhaps it's time to stop looking for the answers and instead focus on extinguishing the questions; then the things that you learned might become applicable."

That sounds reasonable. I think I have enough book-knowledge. But how to extinguish the questions? By looking "behind them for the intention to solve them" and/or "at the unpleasant feeling itself, regardless of what is there (whether a question or anything else)"?

"What is more important—to have answers or not to suffer?" The latter, but it is hard to see that this is possible without having the answers.

I understand now what you meant when you said: “If there are two individuals and if consciousness is bound to individuals, they must ‘arrange’ themselves as ‘this’ and ‘that’, ‘internal’ and ‘external’. They can’t be both ‘internal’ or both ‘external’, because they are two.” This is essentially correct, that is how aggregates arrange themselves in the experience as a whole, and there is no real reason for the Self to be attributed to any of them (except the ignorance of course). However, when you say:

Consciousness does not exist on the level of ‘self’ and ‘others’ and ‘internal’ and ‘external’, so only *this* consciousness exists and ‘self’ and ‘others’, ‘internal’ and ‘external’ only apply to the *content* (*nāmarūpa*) of *this* consciousness but *not to consciousness itself* (which is only the presence of *this* content, i.e. of ‘me in the world’).

It is true that consciousness doesn’t exist on the *level* of Self and Others, but I don’t think that you can say that “‘internal’ and ‘external’ only apply to the *content* (*nāmarūpa*) of *this* consciousness but *not to consciousness itself*.” Consciousness cannot exist by itself, and although it is indeed true that ‘internal’ and ‘external’ can be discerned in relation to *nāmarūpa*, consciousness is nevertheless affected by it, in the sense that if there is an internal there has to be an external. As a result of this, there can be many consciousnesses even within your individual experience, many ‘angles’ of looking at things, i.e. multiple sense impacts which you are simultaneously aware of, reflexion, etc. It’s plurality of consciousness that people don’t notice, they thus easily fall into an assumption that ‘Self = consciousness’. In the experience of Others, there is just an extra dimension added to it, which nevertheless has to come within this pattern.

“Is there any other way to relate to the consciousnesses of ‘others’ apart from assuming (imagining) them as ‘things that exist (out there)’? Is there any other way to relate to ‘one’s own’ consciousness apart from assuming (imagining) it as a ‘thing that exists (in here)’?”

As I might have mentioned earlier, the important thing is to see that *existence* is a relation of *nāmarūpa-viññāṇa* as a whole. You cannot see your

existence from outside, and assuming that consciousness *exists* like the other things, means assuming that consciousness *appears* like the other things do. The appearance of *nāmarūpa* is because of consciousness, but then consciousness is *there* because of that *nāmarūpa* (i.e. consciousness doesn't appear at all). No-one takes priority here, and that fact must be kept in mind all the time in order to see the phenomena correctly. So whether you are relating to your own or the consciousness of Others, there is *no need to assume that it exists*, the fact that those things are already *given*, means the consciousness is already there.

[M. 42]

12 June 2010

After reading it, things seem to become clearer now. And it appears possible to me that we partly misunderstood each other. But in order to find that out, I have to ask you a question. You spoke about 'experience as a whole'. My question: Do you agree that there is no plural(ity) of 'experience as a whole'?

In case you agree: It was exactly this that I meant when I said earlier that according to my understanding there is only *this (one)* consciousness and no other consciousness. And my 'only' mistake was that I used the word consciousness instead of experience (which includes *nāmarūpa*).

After your last letter I can see now how there can be consciousness external, which is not consciousness *in* the external but the presence or being-given *of* the external. Consciousness of others is presence or being-given *of* others and not experience *in* others. Experience is neither in me nor in others. Both 'me' and 'others' are 'content' of the experience (as a whole). And since consciousness (as one of the constituents of that experience) is the presence of that 'content' (phenomena or *nāmarūpa*). It can be said that there is consciousness (presence *of* and not *in* the) internal and external. I used to have that understanding all the time *intuitively*, but I seemed to have mixed up the words and could not express it properly. I cannot re-accept the 'normal' view that there is a (hidden) second 'experience as a whole' apart from *this* 'experience as a whole'. Assuming experience *in* others (out there) is as wrong as assuming experience *in* me (in here). *Experience as a whole is neither internal nor*

external. That was my point all the time, but I used the word ‘consciousness’ instead of ‘experience’ and thereby I seem to have missed the point, since consciousness is only one of the constituents of experience.

But there must still be something very wrong with my understanding since I suffer so much from that fear of annihilation.

[M. 43]

12 June 2010

I only want to add something to my last letter which I think is worth mentioning, since it shows why my views are not compatible with reality.

- 1) Consciousness is the presence of things.
- 2) The sense organs are things.
- 3) Therefore the presence of the sense organs is a matter of consciousness, i.e. they must *appear* in order to be present.
- 4) Consciousness depends on the sense organs.
- 5) But since the sense organs must be present (i.e. must appear) ‘before’ consciousness can depend on them, the relation between consciousness and the sense organs is equal to the relation of consciousness and feeling/perception.

And that is certainly not the case in real life. I can (for example) lose my sight *for no apparent reason*, which clearly shows that consciousness together with its content depends on *something beyond* it. (Maybe I find out afterwards with the help of doctors that I had a brain bleeding.) But in order for consciousness to depend on something beyond it, that something *must* be present. But if presence is just another name for consciousness, that very thing—just by being present—is on the level of feeling and perception and therefore not beyond consciousness. This problem is killing me. But I don’t want to drop it. It is about *rūpa* again, as I see now. You once wrote that *rūpa* exists outside the appearance but as the appearance. But what if I never come to know the reason for my above-mentioned loss of sight? What when the ‘brain bleeding’ never appears to me (in terms of a diagnosis for example)? Did something happen beyond the experience (‘brain bleeding’)? If not, how could my sight vanish then? If yes, the happening—in order to take place—must be

present, but presence means consciousness, which makes that happening ('brain bleeding') a feeling/perception (which was not the case either). So there is no way out of that problem. I don't see it. Can you help again?

[N. 36]

22 June 2010

I agree—there is no plurality of the “experience as a whole” (but the fact that it is singular doesn't mean that you can step outside of it and look at it as one). Also, thank-you for clarifying further what you meant. It is a difficult subject to express in words, so misunderstandings are to be expected.

You mentioned: “Consciousness of others is presence or being-given of others and not experience *in* others. Experience is neither in me nor in others. Both ‘me’ and ‘others’ are ‘content’ of the experience (as a whole).”

That is indeed so. You can also tie this in with what Ven. Ñāṇavīra had to say on ‘there’, ‘here’ and ‘yonder’. ‘Me’ and ‘others’ just further complicates the picture, but only because the picture had a tendency to be complicated (i.e. *avijjā*).

Are you sure that it is the fear of annihilation that causes you suffering? Or perhaps, it is the firm grip you are holding on your experience because of the idea of annihilation?

Regarding the points from 1 to 4: Sense organs do not appear in your experience as sense organs. They can only appear when observed by the other senses different from themselves as parts of your body made out of flesh, i.e. objects in the world. That's why in the Suttas they are always indirectly described (almost in a medical sense). Ven. Ñāṇavīra wrote about this in his Early Letters to Ven. Ñāṇamoli. The point he was making was that the only difference between sense organs and other objects is that sense organs are *that because of which* there is a perception, taste, etc. in the first place. However, with *avijjā* present, this ‘indirect’ nature (i.e. inability to see your eyes, taste your tongue, smell your nose, etc.) of sense organs, deceives one into believing that there is also a perceiver of that world—a Self.

To continue further—you can know consciousness only from your experience, you cannot imagine it on its own (or with something else) *before* the experience arises. The same applies to ‘matter’. This is what I meant by “*rūpa* exists outside the appearance but as the appearance.” The appearance of things *requires* matter and consciousness to be already there, and the fact that things appear means that this is the case. You cannot go out of the appearance (i.e. experience in this case) and see the components individually before they come together, because no matter how far you go and whatever you see, will still be *the experience—the five aggregates*. Your problem is in trying to *distinguish* these things *temporally*, as opposed to *structurally*. This is very important to note and, if needed, I am happy to clarify it further.

This should answer all of the questions in your addendum since they are all based on that temporal difference. Just for example, when you ask: “What when the ‘brain bleeding’ never appears to me (in terms of a diagnosis for example)?” Brain bleeding doesn’t have to appear as a diagnosis in order to be part of one’s experience, it’s enough for it to happen and as a result of it one, let’s say, gets paralyzed. Paralysis is the direct experience of the stroke which is now *present as the past event, which must have happened*, since the paralysis is here now. If the stroke happens, but there are no signs of it at all, you can’t say that it really happened. This is however slightly misleading since, if I say “if the stroke happens,” means that you already *know* that stroke happened, whether other symptoms are present or not makes no difference (mind is also a sense). In other words the stroke will happen only if it appears through one of the senses (thus six different types of consciousness, for every sense).

[M. 44]

24 June 2010

You wrote: “I agree—there is no plurality of the ‘experience as a whole’...” I am relieved to hear that, because I am fairly sure about this (it ‘feels’ like that and when I carefully investigate the matter, it turns out to be the only possible way to avoid all kinds of philosophical problems).

You ask: “Are you sure that it is the fear of annihilation that causes you suffering? Or, perhaps it is the firm grip you are holding on your

experience because of the idea of annihilation?”

That is a good question. I have no definite answer. Quite often it begins with a certain discomfort in the body, which I regard as (potentially) dangerous. And as a result of that the fear/panic arises. In other words: I cannot remain calm and relaxed when faced with a real or imagined threat to my conscious existence. The fear itself seems to be a bodily reaction to my thoughts. Does that mean that the solution to the problem is to stop thinking in ways that give rise to fear?

Suffering seems to be the inability to bear the weight of the feelings. But the trouble with the pleasant and unpleasant feelings is that they are *not neutral*. Things do appear in an *urging* way. They seem to say “Look at me!” or “Do something!” Their very nature seems to be oppression. If people set me on fire, is there any way to just feel the ‘pain’ *without* experiencing even the slightest *urge* to move the body out of the flames? If not, how could I ever claim to be free from suffering?

You wrote: “Your problem is in trying to *distinguish* these things *temporarily*, as opposed to *structurally*. This is very important to note, and if needed I am happy to clarify it further.” Yes, that would be nice. Things seem to be a little bit clearer now, but I am still unsure. Nothing happens, has happened or will happen unless it *appears* (is present) one way or another (be it as ‘past’, ‘present’ or ‘future’)?

[N. 37]

4 July 2010

1. There is no definite answer to your question: “Does that mean that the solution to the problem is to stop thinking in ways that give rise to fear?” Indeed, if things are becoming unbearable because of thinking about them, one should stop, until everything settles. However, this doesn’t mean that one should start ignoring and repressing one’s thoughts *because* they cause fear. The fear is caused by *holding* to one’s experience, not by the experience itself. So you do have to continue looking into things (in a balanced way, hence the importance of *samādhi*) and then hopefully see how to let them go. You are right when you say: “Suffering seems to be the inability to bear the weight of the feelings.”

2. Resistance to one's own feelings (on the phenomenological level) makes you suffer and not knowing the way out of unpleasant (or pleasant) feelings when touched by them, makes them appear as *urging* and *pressing* for solution. The only right thing which one can do regarding this, is *seeing feelings as impermanent*. If a feeling is seen as impermanent, the whole pressing nature of it is *instantly* 'drained away'. Being free from suffering doesn't mean not wanting to act when the bodily pain is present, it means not being overwhelmed by it mentally, because the escape is known.

3. Regarding the distinction between temporal and structural aspects of our experience—did you have a chance to read my essay *Hierarchy of Awareness*? If yes, but you couldn't make much of it, I can send you some further things I wrote related to that theme, in an attempt to make it more intelligible for people who were struggling to read it.

4. In any case, in that essay I talked about how the structure always *precedes* time, and when people regard their experience from the temporal outlook primarily (the scientific or objective way of looking at things), it is only because of their wrong views. In order for things to change, i.e. be temporal, they have to be given, they have to *exist*. That existence has its order, which cannot possibly be changed under any circumstances. That order is the order of the five aggregates.

[M. 45]

7 July 2010

1. Regarding the development of *samādhi* and my progress in general, I came to the conclusion that it is best to stop any sexual activity. It is not the first time that I have tried to live abstinent, but this time there was not so much force involved to make the decision, since I can see the danger more clearly now. After all it is a matter of living in accordance with my goal. Ordination is out of range at the moment, since my anxiety level is still too high (I would worry too much about my health, which already consumes a lot of my energy), but within the current bounds of possibility I want to do my best. Ven. Ñāṇavīra also said that if you can't be a *bhikkhu*, be a layman who lives chaste. That is the second best thing. I hope this will help me.

2. How is the “pressing nature” of the feelings related to lust/aversion? Is that “urging” and “pressing” which comes together with the feelings identical with lust/aversion?

3. Yes, I read your essay more than once, but couldn’t make much of it unfortunately. I would be glad if you could also send me those other writings.

4. I fear it is not fully clear to me why the order is: matter, feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness. What I can see is that the appearance is ‘between’ matter and consciousness. But (for example) why does feeling come before perception?

[N. 38]

15 July 2010

1. If you can, I would indeed recommend you live the celibate life. When your mind is withdrawn from sensuality (which takes a lot of effort and restraint), it will be easier to apply things you read in Suttas to your experience. In other words, you will become more firmly established in seeing the phenomenal aspects of experience and eventually find the way out of them. It’s hard work, but it is worth doing it.

2. Yes and no. Giving into that ‘pressure’ or not knowing the way out of it, gives rise to lust/aversion. If you really want to be specific, that pressure is closer in its nature to craving. Whatever we name it, the most important thing is that it should be understood and thus given up.

3. I am sending to you a short note about Fundamental Structure.²⁴ It was written to a friend who also had troubles understanding the *Hierarchy of Awareness* (and also Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s ‘Fundamental Structure’). I hope it will help, though I doubt that it will make things easier.

4. The order of aggregates is the order of aggregates. You cannot change it nor find a reason for it being such as it is. The most you can do is *recognize* it. That is because our experience is always within those aggregates, i.e. made of them, cannot go beyond. Even altering the order is impossible. When you do contemplate the *khandhas*, try contemplating them in the right order; after matter, *feel* the feelings, then *perceive* the perceptions and so on. The most common mistake is that people tend to *perceive* their feelings too, or at least that’s what they think they are

doing. Because of that, the nature of them remains concealed. Also, it is very important to distinguish the imaginary side of things, as opposed to the real—e.g. what you are perceiving right now and what you are imagining (even if that is perception itself).

[M. 46]

16 July 2010

I noticed that you already sent me your note on ‘Fundamental Structure’ in the past, but this is no problem for me of course. I’m sorry that I forgot to mention it last time. Your note is indeed hard to understand too. I tried many times to ‘break through’ Fundamental Structure but at some point there is a blockage. Ven. Mettiko, who translated *Notes on Dhamma* into German, omitted that part in his translation and said that he also had troubles understanding it.

You mentioned in your note that in order to see things correctly, one has to learn how to *feel*. And also in your last letter you wrote: “When you do contemplate the *khandhas*, [...] Because of that, the nature of them remains concealed.” [§4] It is not clear to me what you mean by “perceive feelings.” Paul Debes (for example) said that form and feelings are perceived, but his understanding of perception is closer to Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s “consciousness,” so it can be understood why (for Mr. Debes) feelings are perceived too. Consequently he translated *viññāṇa* not as “consciousness” but as “programmierte Wohlerfahrungssuche,” which in English is something like “programmed search for well-being.” So when people perceive their feelings or think that they perceive their feelings, what does that mean? What is their mistake? Maybe it is also my mistake.

You wrote: “Also, it is very important to distinguish the imaginary side of things, as opposed to the real—e.g. what you are perceiving right now and what you are imagining (even if that is perception itself).” [§4]

Why is it very important? (I don’t ask because I doubt that it is important, but because I don’t fully understand why.) I already noticed that a lot (if not most) of my experience is imaginary. When I close my eyes for example I am still surrounded by a visible (imaginary) environment, but it is very subtle. I also know how I look (especially my face), despite the fact that I can’t see it most of the time. When I focus my

attention on my left foot (without looking at it and without touching it with my hands), I can't feel that there are five toes for example. It's just a 'lump of sensations' (not even a 'foot'). But that 'lump' is normally overlapped by a body-image. Do you mean such things or also something very different?

I would like to ask you a question regarding the instructions the Buddha's gave to Bāhiya:

“Then, Bāhiya, you should train thus: ‘In the seen there shall be just the seen; in the heard there shall be just the heard; in the sensed there shall be just the sensed; in the cognized there shall be just the cognized’—thus, Bāhiya, should you train yourself. When, Bāhiya, for you, in the seen there shall be just the seen...cognized, then, Bāhiya, you (will) not (be) that by which (*tvam na tena*); when, Bāhiya, you (shall) not (be) that by which, then, Bāhiya, you (shall) not (be) in that place (*tvam na tattha*); when, Bāhiya, you (shall) not (be) in that place, then, Bāhiya, you (will) neither (be) here nor yonder nor between the two: just this is the end of suffering.”²⁵

I wonder why there is no mention of impermanence (at least not explicitly). According to my understanding, *anicca* must be seen in order to see *dukkha* and *anattā*: “Whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing.”²⁶ Normally the Buddha teaches like: What is impermanent is unsatisfactory, what is unsatisfactory is not-self.²⁷ But where does impermanence come into play in the case of Bāhiya? As far as I know, he did not receive any instructions from the Buddha before.

You asked: “So when people perceive their feelings or think that they perceive their feelings, what does that mean? What is their mistake?” When people cannot distinguish between the perception and feeling their experience is muddled, and as a result of that they come to assume that perception (as an aggregate) is the same as feeling (as an aggregate), or different, or same-and-different, etc. The point is that as long as these things are not clear, the aggregates cannot be seen in their real nature, so one remains tied to them. This relates to what I said about the importance of distinguishing real and imaginary aspects of the experience. As long as this is not clear, all sorts of assumptions will abide there. You said something in your previous letter which is “It’s just a ‘lump of sensations’ (not even a ‘foot’). But that ‘lump’ is normally overlapped by a body-image.” I underlined “overlapped,” since in this case it represents an exemplification of the nature of superimposition I was talking in *The Hierarchy of Awareness* essay. Let me explain:

In the example you gave, of imagining your foot, whilst not looking at it, there are two different aspects to it: 1. the experience of the ‘lump’; and 2. a body-image. These two experiences, or different aspects of the more general experience, are *equally* present (or nearly equally, which shouldn’t concern us right now), and they both form the experience of you-imagining-your-foot. This picture is quite neutral in itself, a sense of ‘lump’ exists, a body-image exists too. In this instance we have two senses involved, touch and mind. If you open your eyes and look at the foot, the sight will become involved (and probably take priority, since we tend to attach most importance to that sense). The point is that each of the senses contributes to your experience of *the thing* (*dhamma*), in this case your foot, but also, each sense is quite independent of each other (that’s why the existence of independent *matter*, ‘outside’, is required for the consciousness) and they can exist on their own (in which case every instant of them would also be *a thing*). This is, to repeat, the experience in its neutral form. The problem sets in when, because of the lack of understanding (i.e. *avijjā*), one tends to *assume* that the sense of ‘lump’ is the *same* thing as the body-image, or is a *different*, or *both same-and-different*, or *neither-same-nor-different* thing than the body-image. What one

cannot see is the true relationship of that sense of ‘lump’, body-image and a thing as a whole, the relationship of *saṅkhāra-dhamma*. As long as those senses are not seen as they are, some of the assumptions above will have to take place. Superimposition is the reason why those assumptions so easily occur. When things ‘overlap’, as you put it, it’s difficult to see which one comes first, which one second, what is different and what is not. Things are even further complicated with the mind, which is naturally *superimposed* on the other five senses, so in the end you don’t have one or two, you have quite a few different superimpositions operating simultaneously. (This of course cannot be seen at once, it depends on the direction of your attention, but this is a digression.) So that is why it is important to see the imaginary, from real experience.

Regarding your question about Bāhiya, the reason why the Buddha didn’t explicitly teach him *anicca*, was simply because those fundamentals of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* were already implied in what he said to Bāhiya. If you fully understand any of the things the Buddha said, *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* will be realized. You can actually tie in that passage from the Bāhiya Sutta with what I said above about different senses, but I will leave that to you to try, and then let me know what you come up with.

[M. 47]

5 August 2010

Thank-you for your letter, which seems to be a hard nut to crack.

What is wrong with assumption no. 2: that they come to assume that perception is different from feeling? Or is it not wrong content-wise but because it is merely *assumed* but not *seen*?

Does feeling (*vedanā*) have any other phenomenal qualities apart from pleasant, unpleasant and neutral? For example: When people talk about piercing or tingling feelings, do ‘piercing’ and tingling’ belong to feeling or to perception? Or even to all five aggregates? While writing and thinking about this it seems to me that it is certainly wrong to associate “whole things/experiences” with only *one* (or less than five) aggregate(s), so maybe we must regard a ‘tingling’ as a (whole) thing or experience and not as a particular aggregate and therefore it has to participate in all the five aggregates as its constituents? There seems to be a big temptation to

try to look at the aggregates as if they were things or objects of the experience (contents instead of constituents).

I don't understand why the independence of the senses (of each other) requires independent matter 'outside'. Is it possible to give an example? When I see *and* hear someone talking (matter, behaviour) and then close my eyes, the talk still goes on in audible form. Is that what is meant?

Regarding the question about Bāhiya: my understanding is now a bit different. I see a relation to MN 43, which says that the five senses each have a "separate range, a separate domain, and they do not experience one another's range domain." If "in the seen there shall be just the seen" there is no contact possible between the eye (as subject) and the seen, since there is no eye (as subject) visible. I noticed that the sense of being the seer is somehow related to the sense of touch (as well as imagination). My sight or vision seems to be 'attached' to those touch sensations which make up my head (in the first-person perspective). The 'seer' is 'sensed' in this way, so to speak. Or better: The 'seer' finds a footing in the sense of touch. This seems to be an example of "muddled experience," as you called it. So it seems to me that an 'overlapping' or superimposition of the senses is necessary to create a subject by 'muddling' (under the influence of nescience). I could be wrong but if there were only *one* sense, it should be impossible to 'create' a subject which confronts objects.

[N. 40]

13 August 2010

Yes, you are exactly right when you say: "Or is it not wrong content-wise, because it is merely *assumed* but not *seen*?" There can be an assumption that things are the same, but as long as there is an *assumption*, the understanding cannot take place.

When people talk about 'piercing' feelings for example, what they are describing as 'piercing' is most likely the whole of the five aggregates, or, if they are very particular, perception (rather than a feeling). There are many different classes of feeling found in the Suttas, but when it comes down to *feeling* them, they can be pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. You mentioned: "There seems to be a big temptation to try to look at the aggregates as if they were things or objects of the experience (contents

instead of constituents).” And again, I agree. Of course, in the beginning, when one starts contemplating things, this is the only way one is capable of doing it, but then later it should become clear that, whether our experience is small and insignificant or very overwhelming and important, it is always a *whole*. Five aggregates are our experience, and the only way of seeing them is learning how to distinguish them individually, *while they are present*.

You wrote: “I don’t understand why the independence of the senses (of each other) requires independent matter outside...” If matter and consciousness weren’t independent of you, the way out of suffering wouldn’t be possible. It is on account of their independence (or the independence of the five aggregates), that you can realize that your Self doesn’t have the fundamental control over your experience—and in that case—it is not your Self. The independent senses *don’t* require the *independence* of the matter outside. They require matter (or rather consciousness does), and since that matter is independent they will be too. The point is to see that *all of the five aggregates are independent* and exist on their own accord, and this includes your very intention. In other words, when you realize that your own volition is actually ‘belonging’ to things which constitute your experience, not to your Self, you will see what is really meant by not-Self. When your decisions and apparent control of things in your environment is seen as something fully *dependent* upon *the independence of the things “outside,”* they will cease to be yours. (Note, however, that they will continue to operate—intention, volition, etc. are still present even in an *arahat*).

And now to come to the last part of your letter. You said: “The ‘seer’ finds a footing in the sense of touch.” I know what you mean here, but I think it’s more accurate to say that a seer ‘*overlaps*’ with the ‘recipient’ (for lack of better expression) of the touch. And by overlapping I mean they are superimposed over each other, so if not distinguished, they will be seen as one (or Self). Interestingly I just wrote the sentence above without carefully reading what was to come in the rest of your paragraph. I’m pleased to say that it was virtually the same with what I was about to try to explain. No, you are not wrong, if we were to have one and one sense only, the arising of subject wouldn’t be possible. (That is if we are

talking about the senses only, since the reflection can also play its part in that creation, but that is not important here.)

[M. 48]

16 August 2010

Here is the second part of my answer.

[Re. 3rd para.:] What normally is regarded as independent or ‘outside’ is the world (as opposed to the self or subject)? Would it therefore also be correct to say that in order to see the self as not-self, one has to see the dependence of the self on the world?

[Re. 4th para.:] The reason why I said that the ‘seer’ finds a footing in the sense of touch was related to the thought that, with *one* sense only, it wouldn’t be possible to ‘create’ a subject, i.e. the seer must be ‘touched’ (for example) since he cannot be seen. Therefore I don’t understand why it would be more accurate to say that the seer ‘overlaps’ with the ‘recipient’ of the touch, because the existence of the seer (and the recipient of the touch) depends on that overlapping. But that was just a thought.

At the moment (of writing this) I can’t get really into that matter and I am most possibly wrong with my assumptions. What I meant to say can perhaps be summarized in the following question: Could I remain as the seer if I could no longer feel my body, especially my head? Because it seems to me that the place from where I look at things is the body or head given as a ‘lump’ of touch sensations. Without that ‘lump’, where would ‘I’ be? From where could I see? The other Ven. Ñāṇamoli (friend of Ven. Ñāṇavīra) once asked what would happen to him if he could see all around him (in every direction all at once). Maybe this is a similar question, because it seems to me that the seer (or subject in general) requires some ‘hidden space’ to occupy. In the case of a seer, that space cannot be occupied by something visible, so the seer must be given otherwise, i.e. as object of a different sense (touch for example). That was what I meant (in case we misunderstood). But somehow that appears to me as already ‘muddled’ again, because I try to make things easy and that never works (if they aren’t easy). I think I just try to block out the negative aspects of

the experience again: If the seer cannot be seen he must be (positively) felt by the sense of touch. Wrong.

[N. 41]

24 August 2010

You are right in saying that what is normally regarded as being outside is the *world*. This, however, has to be qualified correctly in order to prevent any misunderstandings. To refer you to the example of Bāhiya, which Ven. Ñāṇavīra mentions in one of his letters, if you can look up the discussion about the difference between “here,” “yonder” and “there.” When I talk of the independent aggregates, that pertains to the level of “*there*.” However, when you mentioned the “world” in your last letter, I had an impression that that pertained more to the level of “*yonder*.” (Please feel free to correct me if I am wrong.) Clarifying the difference between these terms is crucial (again you can read Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s account of it). “There” is our experience, as a *whole*, i.e. the five-(holding)-aggregates. “Here” and “yonder,” on the other hand, are something which can be distinguished *within* that “there,” and *only* once (and *while*) “there” is manifested.

The point is that I agree with you when you say: “in order to see the self as not-self one has to see the dependence of the self on the world,” but only if that *world* corresponds to the meaning of “there.” (Which it does, in the Suttas.) Let me now try to make myself clearer (sorry if I failed the first time), regarding the second part of your letter and the questions you raise.

The reason why I thought it more accurate to say “overlapping,” as opposed to “finds footing,” is because there is *nothing* which really finds any footing at all in the sense of touch (or any other sense). Nevertheless that *nothing* is being ‘pointed at’ by the objects, and with the presence of *avijjā*, and when the thing overlaps (in reflection or through the simultaneous experience of different senses), that nothing becomes something which one gives into and regards as one’s Self. That’s what I meant with my statement in the previous letter. It was clear from your letter that when you said that “the seer finds footing in...” you didn’t take that seer for granted. However, the statement itself implies the opposite,

since in order for something to find footing, that something has to *exist*. (There is a famous line from the Suttas—“matter finds footing in consciousness,”²⁸ but here matter *does* exist). If you had said “the seer appears...” that would also be fine, but really, these are just subtleties, the most important thing is that we understand each other... in our attempts to understand each other.

If I can go back to what I said above, and see if I can add something to it. So, it can clearly be seen that *that* which is mistaken for a self, does exist (even if it's *nothing*), and it is regarded so because of *the overlapping of a thing experienced through different senses at once*. As you are probably aware, every experience is intentional and every experience (that of a *puthujjana*) *points to an apparent subject* (i.e. the seer). If there is only one sense for example (no reflection, no other senses), this subject wouldn't be manifested, there would be only a thing and a *pointing*. When you have two instances (or more), of that *thing-pointing* pair, that *which is being pointed at* is starting to intensify, i.e. things are pointing at it harder and harder. Needless to say, a *puthujjana* is bound to succumb to the pressure and accept the apparent existence of that something which is so intensively being pointed at (that ‘something’ is nothing but the apparent Self).

You said: “It seems to me that the seer (or subject in general) requires some ‘hidden space’ to occupy.” I find this an interesting statement, and it looks quite relevant to what I have said above. It seems to me that the idea of a “hidden space” that you mention, corresponds to “something” which is being confused as Self. (Actually, I might have misunderstood you completely, and you might have meant something completely different by this.)

“In case of a seer that space cannot be occupied by something visible, so the seer must be given otherwise, i.e. as object of a different sense (touch for example).” This is indeed so, and this happens *after* the sense of self has already been established in what I've described above. Different external things correspond, or again *overlap*, in our phenomenological experience, with that sense of Self acquired through the senses. Our head in particular tends to be appropriated by the Self, since the experience of seeing is the most dominant one and the head is that which is always *not-*

seen (like the eyes, like the Self). If, by some miracle, we would suddenly be able to see our eye sockets and our head from the inside, it would soon cease to be the property of the seeing Self, though we would still have to deal with what that head experienced through the other senses.

P.S. Now when I come to think of it, it would have been better if I had used “superimposed” rather than “overlapping.” I forgot that Ven. Ñāṇavīra used “overlapping” to describe the relationship between consciousness and matter, and that’s not what I was talking about here. In any case, sorry if there was any confusion caused, but “superimposed” is definitely a more accurate representation than “overlap.”

[M. 49]

28 August 2010

Your impression was correct, I mistakenly regarded the world as the ‘yonder’ (opposed to the self as ‘here’).

I want to make sure that I understand what is meant by that “nothing” which is being “pointed at” by the objects. Is this the seemingly ‘inner end’ of the perspective? If I look at something for example, my looking seems to be perpendicular to the object I look at. That object is a ‘something’. But when I try to follow my own looking back inside to the place from where it seems to originate, I find ‘nothing’ (visible), but yet this place seems to be there. Is that an example of the nothing which is being pointed at by the objects? At least it is an example of what I meant by ‘hidden space’ in my last letter.

What you said [in para. 5], I think your understanding of my statement is correct.

[Re. P.S.:] No problem (and no additional confusion caused).

Right now there is nothing here (in me) which indicates that I will grow old, or that I will fall sick or that I am going to die. Sure, I remember that my body was different in the past or that it was ill, and I can see other people's old, sick or dead bodies, and there is also *no* indication that these things will *not* happen to me, but the point is that I am left with *uncertainty*. Apart from 'common sense', which tells me that I am no exception, there is no understanding why my current state necessarily must come to an end by old age, sickness and death. Will this ever change? Does (for example) a *sotāpanna* know that his body or his whole world will fall apart one day, or is it still only 'common sense' which is telling him this? Or is this not the kind of knowledge or certainty which is gained on the path? I only know that some really profound understanding must be present to bring about a real change. Everything I know is unable to do it. What remains is this uncertainty.

When the Buddha in the Suttas asks his listeners whether the eye, ear, etc. are permanent or impermanent, they reply 'impermanent'. If I ask an ordinary man on the street the same question, he would certainly give the same answer "since everyone knows that this body is not forever." But is it *that* trivial? Does the Buddha appeal to the 'common sense' of the people when asking whether the eye is permanent or impermanent? I ask you this question because I have noticed that no-one else seems to share my above-mentioned "lack of certainty" regarding one's own decay and death, or at least no-one else seems to have a problem with that. So it might be that I expect more 'depth' from a statement such as "the eye is impermanent" than it actually has. On the other hand: If it were that 'easy', many more people should be awakened (provided they are not like me asking how one can know for sure that the eye is impermanent and/or that no eternal eye can be acquired in the next life).

Please also tell me if you think that I lay too much emphasis on (this kind of) understanding impermanence. Maybe I'm totally on the wrong track.

I find your questions about aging and death quite interesting, and also quite common for most people when they think about these things. The problem is that people are confusing the phenomenological nature of the experience with the ‘common sense’ one. The fact is that you *could* die at any given moment, which means that *death*, as such, applies to you. People think that death is something that they can observe in other people, and then use the common sense to apply it to themselves, in which case it does not bear as much weight as it would if experienced directly. Indeed, death that you can see in others reveals a tiny bit of the nature of death, but when death comes, the whole thing can be, and will be, experienced only by an individual. Common sense can help you initially by encouraging you towards contemplation of your own death, but by no means can the common sense encompass the whole experience of death.

—“Apart from ‘common sense’, which tells me that I am no exception, there is no understanding why my current state necessarily must come to an end by old age, sickness and death. Will this ever change?”

It will change only if you directly see that this body will fall apart. Common sense is incompatible with the present experience in a phenomenological sense, i.e. while you are alive you cannot have the experience of death. You have to stop identifying death with the picture of death you gain through common sense, and use it only as an indicator towards something which will inevitably happen.

—“Does (for example) a *sotāpanna* know that his body or his whole world will fall apart one day or is it still only ‘common sense’ which is telling him this?”

The *sotāpanna* knows that whatever arises has to cease, thus he knows that *the nature of his body* is to die. That doesn’t mean that death, in a common sense, is always on his mind (but it does mean that the degree of *holding* towards his body and life is diminished because of that knowledge).

—“I only know that some really profound understanding must be present to bring about a real change. Everything I know is unable to do it. What remains is this uncertainty.”

What exactly do you expect to change? The uncertainty might be telling you something.

—“Does the Buddha appeal to the ‘common sense’ of the people when asking whether the eye is permanent or impermanent?”

No, the Buddha doesn’t use common sense to explain the Dhamma (that would be impossible). When the Buddha says ‘impermanent’, he means it in a phenomenological sense, while everyone else, short of a *sotāpanna*, means it in a common sense (or rationally, as Ven. Ñāṇavīra would say). The ordinary man on the street would say “impermanent” indeed, but for him that impermanence doesn’t have the same depth of meaning, because if it would, it would lead him to liberation. One has to undo all of the wrong views acquired in the course of time, and only in that case, one might be able to understand the true meaning of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*. If anyone can understand impermanence in the way the Buddha has taught, that person would be at least a *sotāpanna*, if not more.

—“Please also tell me if you think that I lay too much emphasis on (this kind of) understanding impermanence. Maybe I’m totally on the wrong track.”

Not at all, as it is probably clear from what I’ve said above. If you feel that your understanding of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* is not gradually freeing you from suffering, you should indeed strive even harder in order to understand. Even if you think that your understanding is reducing the amount of existential suffering, then you should still continue with the same pondering on the impermanence, suffering and not-self, so that you can free yourself once and for all.

1. You say: “The fact is that you *could* die at any given moment, which means that *death*, as such, applies to you.” Yes, that is also how I experience it. It is not that I *know* that it will happen, but rather that I can’t see anything which could *prevent* it from happening. The realization that I am here for no apparent reason goes hand in hand with the realization that there is also no apparent reason which could prevent my whole world from vanishing at any moment. And this is very frightening (at least for me). Of course there are certainly reasons why I am here (ignorance, craving, *kamma*, my parents, food, etc.) and why the world doesn’t vanish right now, but these reasons *belong* to the world, but the world as such (or the experience as a whole) is ‘just there’ and cannot be justified. That’s at least how I experience it. I think you know what I mean. ‘To be’ is a real disaster if one dares to look at it in this way. The premonition of ‘non-being’ or death lurks everywhere (in the sense that it cannot be ruled out). But this only gives me the feeling of not being safe and of more and more fear and anxiety. It is not liberating.

2. I said that apart from ‘common sense’, which tells me that I am no exception, there is no understanding why my current state necessarily must come to an end by old age, sickness and death. And then I asked: Will this ever change? You replied: “It will change only if you directly see that this body will fall apart.” Can one directly see that this body will fall apart? How is that done? I remember some stories about meditation experiences where people saw their own bodies as a corpse and where they were able to imagine vividly the decay of their body in detail, but to me these are just exercises in imagination done by a trained mind, i.e. they look at something before their mind’s eye, and to me this is not really different than looking at a corpse in front of me. While certainly impressive it doesn’t tell me much about my own faith, especially if I’m not *willing to believe* that my body is of the same nature. As long as there is even a little room for doubt, I cannot call such things ‘insights’.

3. You say: “The *sotāpanna* knows that whatever arises has to cease, thus he knows that *the nature of his body* is to die. That doesn’t mean that death, in a common sense, is always on his mind (but it does mean that the

degree of *holding* towards his body and life is diminished because of that knowledge).”

Yes, that seems to be the crucial point, i.e. the knowledge that whatever arises has to cease, which certainly does not require the image of a rotten corpse in one’s mind. It must be deeper, more immediate, like looking at something ‘red’ and then one knows that it is ‘red’ (and not ‘green’ or ‘blue’) without telling oneself a story about ‘what red is’.

4. I said that I only know that some really profound understanding must be present to bring about a real change and that everything I know is unable to do it, so what remains is this uncertainty. You replied: “What exactly do you expect to change? The uncertainty might be telling you something.” Later in your letter you mention the reduction of the amount of *existential suffering*. This is what I expect to change. The fear, the anxiety when faced with my own impermanence or with the possibility of ‘non-being’. This inner shaking and trembling when one’s world falls apart. It feels like living on a ticking time-bomb where you don’t know how much time is left for you to defuse the bomb. Did you have anything particular in mind when you say that the uncertainty might be telling me something?

5. [Re. para. 5:] OK, that is also how I see it, since the ‘easy way’ did not work for me (and certainly for no-one else). But what is the impermanence of the eye, ear, etc. in a phenomenological sense? Is it the *discontinuous* presence of these organs in one’s experience? Strictly speaking and from a subjective point of view, I don’t have sense organs unless they are somehow present in terms of perception/imagination. Is the ‘phenomenological impermanence’ related to that?

1. Fear and anxiety are, as I mentioned before, part of the experience when you direct your mind towards the possibility of death. If you get established in morality, and with the practice of *samādhi*, these feelings won't be able to move you as much. When you 'get used to' the anxiety and fear you are feeling (i.e. overcome the urge to get rid of it), you will be able to look closer at the things and then hopefully see in which way you are appropriating them (and by doing so—let go).

2. "Can one directly see that this body will fall apart? How is that done?" As I replied—"The *sotāpanna* knows that whatever arises has to cease, thus he knows that *the nature of his body* is to die." Whatever arises in your experience *has to* cease. There is nothing anyone can do about it. What you can do is *find* the way, so that knowing that everything will come to an end will bring liberation.

3. Exactly. Initially you have to think about things, but later, once the insights are established, you know them as they are. That's why, although you have to start through thinking which circulates around the subject and then hopefully narrow it down, the goal should be to bring the thinking to the point where you will know things without *having to make the effort* to think about them.

4. The sense of urgency is good because it makes you strive; but patience is also very important because right view is most likely not going to be obtained overnight (wrong views are not either). The fact that you are alive at this moment should be enough for you to keep going, because that's the only real requirement for one's practice. Also, as we all know, there is not much else really worth doing in this life. Anxiety will come, or rather *has to come*, as part of one's progress, but as long as that person is still alive and capable of putting in the effort, that's all that matters. What I'm trying to say, I guess, is that, despite all of the challenges you come across, such as the frightful experience of the possibility of non-being, not quitting the effort is what should be your main concern.

You wrote: "Did you have anything particular in mind when you say that the uncertainty might be telling me something?" Why is *that* uncertainty unpleasant?

5. No, it's the matter they are made of, *being direct subject to change*. When the sense organs are present in your experience externally, i.e. through perception/imagination (this indirect way of them appearing to you is the only way that they can actually appear—e.g. the eye cannot see itself), the matter they consist of *is there*, as *matter*, and that's where the impermanence lies. That's the "phenomenological impermanence" I was referring to.

[M. 52]

17 November 2010

You ask: "Why is that uncertainty unpleasant?" I think it has something to do with the fact that the Buddha and his *ariyan* disciples seem to know something which I also want to know so desperately but which seems *unknowable* or *uncertain* to me the more I think about it (that whatever arises has to cease, for example). And since this kind of knowledge is not about "hidden entities in outer space" but about my very experience, it must—in a sense—be something very obvious which is staring me in the face all the time, so to speak. But I still don't see it, however much I try. And this is frustrating/unpleasant.

[Re. para. 5:] I have to admit that I (still) don't understand this. I would like to point out the problem (again). My understanding is that matter has to appear (perception/imagination) in order to exist/to be present. In other words: If there is no perception/imagination, there is no matter. But from this it follows that I have no eyes (no brain, no heart, no back and also no parents, no kitchen, etc.) until I perceive/imagine them. So the (matter of the) eyes seems to depend on perception/imagination and not *vice versa*. This feels so *painfully wrong yet unavoidable* if matter has to appear (perception/imagination) in order to exist/to be present. But how can I say that my experience depends on sense organs if these very organs must themselves be perceived/imagined in the first place in order to exist?

The contradiction seems to lie in the fact that independent matter is required but cannot exist until it has appeared in some way or other (which undermines the required independence). *So if seeing depends on the eyes, the eyes must be there as long as I see. And since I don't need to*

perceive/imagine my eyes in order to see, my eyes must be there independently of perception/imagination. But this is not allowed since 'to exist means to appear'. I hope you understand what I mean and also see the contradiction. But where is my mistake? I can't see it.

[N. 44]

27 November 2010

I understand what you mean. And it is also quite normal to be in a state of frustration over this. The important thing for you is *not to see or discover* that everything that arises has to pass; the important thing is *to recognize* that everything that arises has to pass. The reason why I am saying this is that people might often expect to find something new, something which *wasn't there before* in their experience. Needless to say, the only thing that they will find in such a way is frustration. It is quite normal, as I said before, but there has to be a point when one realizes that if anything is to be impermanent, it will have to be on a level of things *already there*, in one's experience (cf. Sister Vajirā's statement again, that the reason that she couldn't see the Dhamma for so long, was because she would *deny* things as soon as they would appear). You don't have to look, or invent, or create impermanence; you have to find it *within* things that seem permanent.

As a matter of fact, what is permanence? Look at the things which seem permanent and try to understand the *nature* of their permanence. It might surprise you how impermanent it will seem.

Regarding the second part of your letter: the most important thing you have to distinguish is the difference between a thing *appearing* and *existing*. In the *arahat's* experience, things appear but the *bhava* has ceased. Matter *is*, but that 'is' is on its own accord. Matter doesn't require your perception in order to be matter. However, in order for matter to *exist in your experience*, consciousness is required. (Again, in the *arahat's* case, consciousness has ceased, therefore matter has no footing for its existence.) Things can appear without having to exist (in the pregnant sense of *bhava*, as Ven. Ñāṇavīra said). So *esse est percipi* is true, in the sense that *to be*, you *have to be perceived*. But this isn't so in the reverse direction—*being* is *not required* in order for something to *be perceived*.

Perception *precedes* being, *structurally*. The problem is that, with the *puthujjana*, *appearance* and *existence* are indistinguishable, and as long as this is the case they remain *puthujjanas*.

This should answer your question (which by the way, you formulated very nicely): “But how can I say that my experience depends on sense organs if these very organs must themselves be perceived/imagined in the first place in order to exist?”

Your sense organs *are there*, and their ‘*being there*’ comes (structurally but simultaneously) *before* their *existing*, which on the other hand comes with you *perceiving* them. If you thoroughly understand their ‘*being there*’, your perception will gradually cease to *generate* their existence. Judging by your questions this matter seems fairly clear to you, in all of its confusion of course. Also it seems to me that all of the questions in your previous letter, no matter how different they might sound, come from the same place of *identifying* appearance and existence.

This might help: Let’s say that ‘*appearance*’, if it falls onto the direction of Self, *means existence*; and if it falls onto the direction of ‘*being there*’ I was talking about, *means the independence* of the matter (and other aggregates), therefore *impermanence*, therefore *suffering*, therefore *not-Self*.

[M. 53]

4 December 2010

It seems that I am at my wit’s end, at least for the time being. In my fruitless attempts to understand the independence of matter, I only go from one extreme to the other and neither is satisfying. I think you are right when you say that all of the questions in my previous letter come from the same place of *identifying* appearance and existence. Maybe a dozen times I tried to respond to your letter, but I couldn’t finish it. The only questions I could come up with were such that I can answer them for myself, which (in this case) is not at all helpful. So for now I have decided to just let you know that I received your letter. It is a bit strange: I would like to inquire further into the matter, but I don’t know how. If this changes I would be happy to take up that topic again and to ask the related questions.

Perhaps I will be able to add something more to my previous letter, which can in turn make things slightly clearer for you (or perhaps help you in formulating your questions).

You said that your “attempts to understand the independence of matter” are fruitless. As far as I can see here, the problem lies in the fact that you are *intentionally* setting yourself upon an understanding of ‘matter’. This is quite a normal way of operating in day-to-day dealings with the environment, but, when one tries to understand the very nature of experience (which includes that intention), this kind of method or attempt will not work. What I’m aiming at is that your ‘intention’ being sent *towards* the ‘matter’ in your present experience, cannot possibly reach that ‘matter’ in its entirety, in such a way. The reason is simply because ‘matter’ *structurally precedes* ‘intention’. ‘Matter’ is *already* there, *before* intention. (The fact that you are able to intend and will, means that ‘matter’ is there.)

You might wonder then, quite understandably, how can one see *rūpa*, if ‘intention’ cannot reach it. The answer may be multiple, but perhaps the most appropriate one would be—through repetitive effort (i.e. intention) and *samādhi*, your act of intending will be ‘refined’, so to speak, and then instead of *going towards* that which *appears to be* ‘matter’, you will look for it as something *already there within* your current experience; as something which is *necessary* for the experience itself. (In other words: in a practice of mindfulness, i.e. reflexion, you can see the structure of your immediate experience, whereby you can recognize the five-aggregates.) However, in order to recognize these things, you will first have to *let them be* (cf. again Sister Vajirā’s correspondence. For her, the intention was closely associated with the ‘Self’ and she couldn’t see the connection between *saṅkhāra* and *cetanā*).²⁹

I could probably also add more on what I meant when I said that you have to distinguish between ‘appearance’ and ‘existence’ (the way I use it), but that would amount to, more or less, what I have said above—the five-aggregates have to appear *first*, before you can *assume* them (i.e. exist them).

On the other hand, in order for something to exist, to be, in a full (appropriated) sense of that word, it has to be *given* as the experience as a whole. When I say ‘given’, that should be understood in the sense that it is *beyond your control*. The five-aggregates appear, disappear, and change-while-standing, of *their own accord*; it is only *upādāna* that appropriates them to an apparent Self. The Self confuses the fact that the aggregates can be *modified* (affected) with the notion that they can be *controlled* (created). This idea maintains the notion of Self, which keeps finding proofs of its existence in modifying (when it can) the *already given* state of the five-aggregates. The idea is based on contradiction, but as long as that contradiction is not seen, the Self will persist... but that too is now a different topic.

[M. 54]

8 December 2010

If I understand you correctly, the independence (which I try to understand) of the five aggregates lies in the fact that *they are beyond my control* (or ‘grasp’). They appear, disappear, and change-while-standing, of *their own accord* (as you say). They ‘resist’ me, so to speak. And I am always ‘too late’ in the sense that I can only discover that *they are already there*, i.e. that the calamity has already happened (when I wake up in the morning—which is beyond my control—it’s already too late to do something about it and I have to live with it). Considering their independence, it seems no longer so surprising to me that ‘the unknown’ or ‘hidden’ is (and must be) also part of the experience, since *it’s not my creation*. It just happens to me and I don’t know why and how. It needs *effort* to discover the ‘mechanics behind’.

The tremendous feeling of alienation with regard to the experience, and of being at the mercy of something unknown, seems to be at the bottom of all my fear and anxiety and confusion. But while this is most unpleasant it nevertheless seems to be justified, because I *am indeed on ‘alien territory’ and at the mercy of ‘the unknown’*, i.e. there is no need to deny that. Otherwise there would be no reason to listen to the Buddha (or to Ven. Ñāṇavīra or to you) and to follow his teachings.

You say: “However, in order to recognize these things, you will first have to let them be [...]” I think I understand what you mean. I have to *let them be as independent as they are*, instead of trying to *appropriate them fully* in the hope that nothing ‘alien’ is left then (which is futile anyhow).

Would it be correct to say that matter is *revealed* by the act of perception rather than *created*? Is matter *indifferent* with regard to appearance, i.e. is appearing only *optional* for matter? Is there such a thing as ‘bare matter’ in a state *prior to appearance/perception*? It seems that perception requires ‘something to be there’ prior to perception (since perception is not creation), and yet this ‘being there’ is only ‘revealed’ *after* or maybe *together* with the perception (as that which is perceived). I’m still writing this in a state of confusion. You say: “I could probably also add more on what I meant when I said that you have to distinguish between ‘appearance’ and ‘existence’ (the way I use it), but that would amount to, more or less, what I have said above—the five-aggregates have to appear *first*, before you can *assume* them (i.e. exist them).” I’m not really sure what it means to ‘assume’ or to ‘exist’ the aggregates. Maybe you can say a bit more about this? What I (at least partly) understand is that something has to appear in order to be present (not ‘for me’ but *at all*), which means that there is no plural of the experience. And from there my confusion seems to arise, since this means that the world is exactly as big or small as the current experience.

[N. 46]

12 December 2010

You said that it seems like the aggregates ‘resist’ you. This is indeed so, though it can be stated more precisely—it is ‘matter’ [of the five-aggregates] that offers *resistance*.

“‘With name-&-matter as condition, contact’, so it was said: how it is, Ānanda, that with name-&-matter as condition there is contact should be seen in this manner. Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the name-body is described,—they being absent, would designation-contact be manifest in the matter-body? — No indeed, lord. — Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those

signs, those indications by which the matter-body is described, they being absent, would resistance-contact be manifest in the name-body? — No indeed, lord. — Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which the name-body and the matter-body are described,—they being absent, would either designation-contact or resistance-contact be manifest? — No indeed, lord. — Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which name-&-matter is described,—they being absent, would contact be manifest? — No indeed, lord. — Therefore, Ānanda, just this is the reason, this is the occasion, this is the arising, this is the condition of contact, that is to say name-&-matter.”³⁰

You are correct again, in saying that one is always “too late” for the five-aggregates, one can only “discover” them as already given. You continue: “Considering their independence, it seems no longer so surprising to me that ‘the unknown’ or ‘hidden’ is (and must be) also part of the experience, since it is not my creation.” That was exactly my point. Any experience, be it the experience of a clearest, brightest summer day, or the experience of the darkest, most mystical state of one’s mind, is the experience of the five-aggregates, or rather, that experience is the five-(assumed-)aggregates. The main characteristic of *upādāna*, in *pañc’upādānakkhanda*, is an *assumption* that there is something *apart* from the five-(assumed-)aggregates (that ‘something’ is the Self or a ‘person’). However even *upādāna* is not different from the five-aggregates (nor the same, nor both different-and-same, nor neither-different-nor-same). *Upādāna* is not somehow ‘in between’ or ‘below’ or ‘above’ the five-aggregates. No, it is desire-and-lust *in regard* to the five-(assumed-)aggregates that *upādāna* is there (cf. Cūḷavedalla Sutta, MN 44/i,300). Thus, indeed, one cannot possibly be the creator of the five-(assumed-)aggregates since the very existence of that person is determined by those aggregates. But if one relinquishes delight in pleasure that arises dependent upon the five-(assumed-)aggregates, *upādāna* will *fade away*. The five-aggregates will just remain standing there, “like a palm stump.” Their *existence* will cease—*upādānanirodha*, *bhavanirodha*.

I am glad to see that you are finding it easier to accept the experience of alienation as the most natural (I daresay—normal) and fundamental feeling that one can have towards the world. What else could you possibly feel, in a world that is an ‘alien territory’, and every moment of one’s existence is at the “mercy of the unknown,” as you put it. As a matter of fact, there is a common line from the Suttas that describes this very state rather well (a line which is usually just ‘read over’): “I am a *victim* of suffering, a *prey* to suffering” (MN 67/i,460—italics are mine). One feels like “a prey” to something which is beyond one’s control. One is at the mercy of suffering, since the escape from it is not known.

You also said: “I have to *let them be as independent as they are*, instead of trying to *appropriate them fully* in the hope that nothing ‘alien’ is left.” Correct. You can only overcome the sense of alienation by *extinguishing* the appropriate, not by fulfilling it (which is impossible). You asked: “Would it be correct to say that matter is *revealed* by the act of perception, rather than *created*?” The answer is: yes, it would. Like we often read in the Suttas: “The eye *meets* the form”³¹; the form (matter) is already there, and the ‘eye’ *discovers* it. ‘Matter’ *appears* with consciousness being there; but the ‘appearance’ *exists* only with *ignorance* there.

You were wondering if there is such a thing as ‘bare matter’ prior to perception. ‘Bare matter’ would be the four great elements (earth, water, fire, air). However, you cannot possibly imagine them *on their own*, since they can *exist* only when they find the ‘footing’ in consciousness. (Cf. NoD, RŪPA.)

* * *

“Assuming the five-aggregates” means *taking them up*, as I mentioned earlier on. They can ‘exist’ *only* to an apparent ‘Self’. When the notion of Self ceases (including the conceit ‘I am’), when the ‘assumption’ *regarding* the five-aggregates fades out, *bhava* ceases too. Does this make sense? Only when ‘being’ ceases, one will be able to see the difference between ‘appearance’ and ‘existence’.³²

I am not quite sure what you mean when you say: “This means that the world is exactly as big or small as the current experience.” If, by this, you

mean that your world is your experience, then I agree, but I would also add that the world is there *first*, your experience arises, and only then the perception of size (large or small) comes into play. If however you meant something else, then this is not important at all.

[M. 55]

26 December 2010

Thank-you for your letter. You helped me a lot to improve my understanding! I can see more clearly now that the *whole* experience is independent or ‘already given’, not just matter, but the other aggregates too. Before ‘I am’, *they already are* (logically or structurally).

On the Path Press website I found an article of yours which is very closely related to what we discussed here: *Existence means control*. It was also very helpful (as if written for me, so to speak).

But I’m still ‘digesting’ these things (which means that there is still confusion), which is certainly the main reason why I’m so late with my answer (despite the fact that I tried to answer almost every day). Sorry about that.

What is still not really clear to me is the ‘status’ of (bare) matter *prior* to perception as well as the ‘status’ of other people’s minds. I once asked you whether you agree with me that there is no plural(ity) of the experience as a whole. Your answer was: “Yes, I agree—there is no plurality of the ‘experience as a whole’ (but the fact that it is singular doesn’t mean that you can step outside of it and look at it as one).” And in the Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s letters (L. 51, 11 April 1963, Mr. Samaratunga) I stumbled upon the following passage:

“The appearance of another person besides myself does not in any very simple way make two *pañc’upādānakkhandhā* instead of just one, for the reason that nobody can see them both in the same way at the same time (like two marbles) and then count ‘one, two’. The appearance of somebody else is a certain *modification* of my experience that requires elaborate description.”

I could easily accept this with my 'old view', but now it appears somehow incompatible with the notion of independence. If the matter of other people's bodies is independent of 'my' perception, and if their senses function similar to my senses, we have at once a *plural* of experience, which at the same time contradicts the fact that no such plural is given. What does that mean? Where is my mistake?

[N. 47]

29 December 2010

I'm pleased to hear that my writings are helping you with your understanding. Regarding your last letter, I have a few points to add:

The problem with the notion of 'bare matter' *prior* to the experience is that it is based on the assumption that 'matter' can exist on its own, *apart* from the experience. In this kind of assumption, 'matter' is placed *before* the five-aggregates, it precedes them. Nevertheless, in reality, even if we hold this view, this assumption can still only be obtained from the five-holding-aggregates. In other words, even if we assume that there is such a thing as a 'bare matter', in itself, that assumption *directly* stands upon our experience as a whole. We develop the idea through our experience. Thus the experience comes *first*, then we can develop different assumptions about it. However this is not so simple because assumption, in its nature, places itself 'in front' of the experience as something which is more fundamental. Assumption places itself first. So we can see here that the problem lies in the *significance* of the assumption. Now that I have said this, you have two options: 1) to think that you shouldn't be thinking in terms of 'bare matter', and then forcefully try to stop it; or 2) you can see that even when you are thinking about 'bare matter', you do so *because* you exist, not *vice versa*. If you then practise this kind of thinking and keep repeating it long enough, it will become clear that the assumption of 'bare matter' was not really the problem; the problem was in the significance of it, what it meant and what it represented for you. Thus, if you keep contemplating the *right order* of things (which means that you must not *deny* its 'components', even if they are the assumptions), you will manage to *restore* that correct order, as a result of which all of the assumptions will lose their significance, and then eventually fade away (since they are

now meaningless misrepresentations of the things that you understood). At this point even the thought of 'bare matter' will no longer obscure the nature of experience. It will be seen as something which simply refers to the 'matter' of the five-aggregates (i.e. the experience). And that 'matter' can only arise simultaneously with the rest of the aggregates.

This brings us to the second problem you raised in your letter, and that is —*others*. As you already mentioned, I did say that there is no plurality of the experience as a whole, but when I refer to it as a 'singular', that mustn't be understood in a sense that you can 'step out' of it, and see it as *one*. Why? Because when there is 'one', there will be 'two'.

The five-aggregates are only the five-aggregates, stretching into infinity in both directions. The presence of another person in your experience doesn't change the fundamentals of that experience (i.e. the five-aggregates) since it cannot possibly do so. What the presence of another does, to your experience, is that it adds another *dimension* to it, another way of *viewing* them. But even this new dimension is not from the 'outside', it is from within the five-aggregates, or your experience as a whole. That is what Ven. Ñāṇavīra meant by a "certain modification of my experience." This additional way of "looking at them" would indeed require an "elaborate description."

You asked: "If the matter of other people's bodies is independent of 'my' perception, and if their senses function similar to my senses, we have at once a *plural* of experience...."

This contradiction you are experiencing can be resolved by clarifying the usage of 'experience', which I think you have confused. If by 'experience' we take the five-aggregates, or five-holding-aggregates, in the fundamental sense, then the 'matter' of your body and the 'matter' of others', their senses, consciousness, would all fall under 'matter', 'feeling', 'perception', 'determinations' and 'consciousness' of the five-aggregates as a whole. Thus, whether it is your body or the body of others, both are *within* the five-aggregates as such. In this case we have taken the term 'experience' to be synonymous with 'the five-aggregates' and consequently there is no contradiction to arise.

If, however, we take 'experience' to mean two different things, 'the five-aggregates' on one end, and 'my experience' (of my body, of my senses, of my world) on the other, the problems will arise, when 'others' appear. We

can resolve this by pointing at the distinction which must be made between ‘my experience’ (or ‘others’ experience’) and the five-aggregates. ‘My experience’ is *not* on the same level as the five-aggregates, i.e. it is not fundamental, therefore the term ‘experience’ cannot be used for both of them in the same context. Only when the five-aggregates are there, can you distinguish ‘my’, here, as opposed to ‘their’, yonder; nevertheless—both are *within*; internal and external aspects of the five-aggregates as a whole. So we can see that the contradiction was simply due to misuse of the term ‘experience’, and applying it in the same way to two different things. And there is no problem with the ‘plurality’ either, since we can see now that when ‘plurality’ of the experience is encountered, it is not on the fundamental level (of the five-aggregates). The same can, of course, be applied to ‘singularity’, if by that we take to mean ‘my experience’.

Does this make things clear? My body is determined as mine only by the bodies of others which are not-mine. This is true the other way around too. And my senses—they are known as mine since I can perceive others’ which clearly don’t belong to me. In any case, this division of *internal* and *external* is *within* the five-aggregates. This is why as long as you take internal to be ‘mine’, external will be ‘theirs’. And as long as external is ‘someone else’s’, the internal will be ‘mine’, because it is simply closer to me, in my directional experience as a whole. In each case the Self exists. (Until of course, the internal sense bases are ‘healed’, as the Suttas say, because they are like wounds, and then what remains is just internal, external and internal-and-external.)

Thus your matter, feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness and others’ matter, feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness are just matter, feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness of the five-aggregates.

19. MN 44.
20. MN 44.
21. <http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Madhyamaka> [checked, 21-2-2014]
22. H.J. Blackham, *Six Existentialist Thinkers*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
23. NoD, DHAMMA (d).
24. See 'Questions on Hierarchy of Awareness', p. 404.
25. Ud 1:10.
26. SN 56:11.
27. SN 22:59.
28. "Non-indicative consciousness, infinite and completely radiant: here water, earth, fire, and wind have no footing. Here long and short coarse and fine fair and foul name-and-matter are all brought to an end. With the cessation of consciousness each is here brought to an end." (DN 11)
29. SV.14, p. 71.
30. DN 15 (Tr. Ñāṇavīra Thera [CtP, p. 137]).
31. Cf. SN 12:44.
32. It is very important to immediately qualify this statement. I am not saying that there is a "hidden world of appearance" behind the existence of things. With the presence of *avijjā*, 'that' which appears *exists* (appearance *exists*). With the cessation of *avijjā*, 'that' which appears *does not exist*—the existence ceases, and the five-aggregates remain *appearing, disappearing and change while standing*.

2011

[M. 56]

2 January 2011

Thank-you for your answer, which was helpful again. For the moment I only want to address one point.

You say: “Thus, your matter, feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness and others’ matter, feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness are *just* matter, feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness of the five-aggregates.”

What is really meant by “other’s feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness”? When you talk about your feelings, for example, I don’t feel them, I can only assume that they are there, based on my own experience with feelings. So the question arises whether such *assumptions* are justified. From within ‘my experience’ ‘your feelings’ are out there, they exist apart from ‘my experience’, *but not even as feelings, only as an assumption!* So I think my belief in ‘others’ feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness is liable to the same critique which was applied to the belief in ‘bare matter’ in the first part of your last letter. Am I wrong? So the question is whether others’ feeling, perception, determinations, consciousness’ refer to *real* feeling etc. or only to *assumed* feeling etc.

For example: To cut the finger of *another* person *does not hurt*. Why? Either because there is *no pain there* or because it’s not *my* finger. But according to my understanding of *anattā*, *no finger in the world is my finger*, so there should be either *no pain at all* regardless of which finger is cut, or a cut on *any finger* should hurt, regardless of the body to which the finger is attached.

The solution to this dilemma was my ‘old view’ that ‘my experience’ is the only experience and with ‘my experience’ I meant something similar to ‘the All’:

“At Savatthi. ‘Bhikkhus, I will teach you the all. Listen to that...

‘And what, bhikkhus, is the all? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odours, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile objects, the mind and mental phenomena. This is called the all.

‘If anyone, bhikkhus, should speak thus: “Having rejected this all, I shall make known another all”—that would be a mere empty boast on his part. If he were questioned he would not be able to reply and, further, he would meet with vexation. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, that would not be within his domain.”³³

Is it possible to say something about the above-mentioned dilemma? Where do you see a mistake? I regard “the All” as singular too (only *one* All, not many). Is that wrong?

[N. 48]

2 January 2011

Let me try to explain what I mean by others’ feelings, perception, etc.

The feeling of another person, for example, is as much his as the feeling you are feeling is yours. In other words, they are ‘mine’ and ‘theirs’ if you take them to be so. In the experience as a whole there is just matter, feelings, perception, determinations and consciousness. Some of them sometimes arise *internally*, sometimes *externally*, sometimes both *internally-and-externally*. It is only with appropriation, when things become ‘mine’, that this ‘internal’ is regarded as ‘*me*’, and then consequently ‘external’ as ‘*they*’. You might wonder then what is that ‘external feeling’, and particularly—*where* is it felt? Again, with the notion of ‘mine’, your feeling will seem yours, it will be for you and felt in you. With ignorance present, you ascribe *whatever* you feel to *yourself*, be it internal, external or internal-and-external. Thus, *every* feeling that appears in your experience becomes *yours*. When this happens then we run into a problem, since indeed there is ‘nothing left’ to be felt by another, everything is already

included 'in you'. Consequently this leads us to an assumption that another person does have his feelings, but they are 'hidden' from us, they are *in* him. So, in order to avoid this discrepancy, in order to understand the problem, one has to go beyond the division mine/others', and see that the fundamental difference between things is not this, but it is rather the *internal* and *external*. This fundamental *dyad* is found in *arahat* and *puthujjana* alike, it's just that, in the case of an *arahat*, all of the appropriation has disappeared and what is left is only "this conscious body, and all objects externally."³⁴ Thus, according to the fundamental division feelings are arising internally, or feelings are arising externally, or both internally-and-externally, in either of these cases there is just *feeling*. However, one can still insist in asking *where* is that external feeling being felt. In order to answer this question, as a first step, we have to abandon not the assumption that others have feelings, but that they are felt *somewhere* (i.e. in space and time). Only then can we reply that 'external feeling', i.e. feelings that arise in the 'objects externally' (*nāmarūpa*) not *in* 'others', are felt *there*, in the experience as a whole. They are felt in the All, as the Sutta you quote says.

Let us try to illustrate this with the example you gave: if another person cuts their finger, their *bodily* pain cannot obviously be felt by you (and that is the *dimension* of another that is inherently hidden from you—i.e. the 'internal' of another). However, if that person with the finger cut off, goes into a complete distress and agony over what happened (sight of blood, fear, etc.), that agony is felt by you, you know it *as* agony, you know it *as* distress—agony and distress are *present*. The difference lies in a fact that this external feeling of distress *does not mean the same* to you. There is no direct threat for you from this distress (unless it is the person you care for that has injured themselves, in which case you *will* feel their pain—that person is taken as 'mine', therefore anything bad that happens to them will be a cause of distress, which will now be regarded as *my* distress). Thus this distress, in our original example whereby a stranger has lost his finger, has a *different significance* for you, than it does for him. It does not represent a danger for you, your body hasn't been affected, and all you have to do is to walk away or call the ambulance and the unpleasant sight will disappear. Nevertheless that unpleasant feeling of

distress was still felt as unpleasant, just in a different degree, because of the difference in the significance we mentioned. If, for example, a person in distress blames you (*because* he is distraught) for his loss of a finger, then the significance has changed and you feel threatened—distress is ‘coming closer’. If he takes a knife and starts chasing you, you will be distraught on account of the same event, which has now evolved into a more elaborate picture which puts you in danger. At this point, the ‘external distress’ that you initially felt, the ‘distress of another’, now spreads internally (‘you’ are distraught now as well), or perhaps both internally-and-externally (a distraught man is attacking you who is distraught too). Nevertheless, in all of these cases, we simply had a *phenomenon* of distress. If, for example, you have an option to spend a nice quiet afternoon, without any disturbance whatsoever, or go into a room full of limbless people screaming in agony, which would you choose? Obviously we would all avoid the unpleasure of (someone else’s) agony. Thus, even externally, we *feel* and we choose on account of how we feel—and the fundamental principle remains: avoiding displeasure, prolonging pleasure.

Does this make it clearer? You asked whether others’ perception, feeling,... refer to real feeling, or only to the assumed one. It should be clear, after the discussion above, that “real” feeling is regarded as real only because it is taken as ‘mine’, not because it is ‘more’ real than the feelings of others. And furthermore, as I have already said, a person not free from ignorance takes *all* feelings to be ‘mine’. That’s why that person has to develop an assumption regarding the feelings of others’. When you witness a person cutting his finger off in an accident, you *assume* that the distress you are witnessing is ‘*in him*’, and that you are only seeing ‘external manifestations’ of that ‘real’ distress he is feeling and you don’t. However, if you get rid of the assumption that a ‘real’ feeling exists, i.e. it is somewhere, observable, all you will be left with is the sight of unpleasure which you feel (therefore you would prefer a quiet and peaceful afternoon instead, no?). That ‘sight of unpleasure’ is, in this case, the *external phenomenon* of distress, it is the *external feeling*. You are less affected by it, since *your* body is not injured, thus your internal dimension remains untouched, which cannot be said for the person who is bleeding. And internal and external exist independent of each other and in different

modes. That is why one meets with frustration when one assumes that external is also felt *like* internal, *somewhere else*. He tries to find that 'somewhere', but in vain. This frustration is usually resolved in two ways: one either denies the existence of 'external' altogether, and decides that 'everything is in me' (idealism); or affirms it as a result of which one turns back towards the 'internal' (because the frustration is still there) and explains it in terms of 'external', i.e. makes the 'internal' *observable* (materialism or objectivism). In both cases the phenomenon, as such, is not reached.

I hope I managed to make this a bit clearer. Obviously, in order to understand it fully, one has to give up some fundamental assumptions about oneself and others. These assumptions will be given up by ceasing to regard things in your experience as 'mine'.

[M. 57]

12 January 2011

Yes, what you say makes it clearer, but it seems to me that I meet the same problem and the frustration about its persistence over and over again. At the level of my previous questions and your related answers, things become clearer, but I can rediscover the problem at the 'next level' again. So I'm at a point where I hesitate to inquire further. For example: "if another person cuts their finger, their *bodily* pain cannot obviously be felt by you (and that is the *dimension* of another, that is inherently hidden from you—i.e. the 'internal' of another)." "New level," "old problem": If there is such a hidden dimension, i.e. the 'internal' of another, '*where*' is it with regard to the experience as a whole (five aggregates)? And if it's *hidden*, how can I know that it is there? And wouldn't the existence of the 'internal' of another require a second (third, fourth,...) 'experience as a whole' (which we already ruled out)?

[N. 49]

9 April 2011

The answer is simple, though far from easy to grasp—in regard to the five aggregates the ‘hidden dimension’ is nothing but the consciousness itself. All of the aggregates arise internally, externally or both. The consciousness is not an exception to this—it is just that with *avijjā*, consciousness externally become that which is ‘other’. External consciousness is not more hidden than the internal one, and none of them *appears* in itself. If it is going to make things easier, you can try regarding the consciousness (internal and external) as a *direction* of a present thing. The direction which is ‘towards me’ (when the Self is taken for granted) is that which is ‘me’, the direction which is ‘away from’ the Self is that which is ‘not-me’, i.e. an other. (To make things even more difficult, if you take the approach of the six-sense-bases, the relationship of the base corresponding consciousnesses with each other is external.)

In conclusion, whether it is internal, or external, or internal-and-external, or internal within the external and *vice versa*, whether it is me or others, the point is that the experience as a whole *comes first*. Trying to interpret and understand it through the relationship of ‘me’ and ‘others’ distorts this primordially, so the only way of doing this correctly is by trying to shift the priority from ‘me’ (and consequently ‘others’) onto the experience-as-a-whole. In plain terms: one has to stop taking the Self of oneself and others for granted. Internal and external can exist without ‘me’ and ‘others’, but conversely is not true.

[M. 58]

11 April 2011

You are right, the answer is far from easy to grasp.

It seems crucial to me to grasp the correct meaning of the term ‘consciousness’. Ven. Ñāṇavīra defines it as the “presence of phenomena.” Although I agree with it, the term “presence” seems a bit artificial and obscure to me now. After a lot of pondering I came to the conclusion that consciousness (or presence or existence) is the *difference* between ‘phenomena’ and ‘no phenomena’. This certainly means the same but appears more meaningful to me, because I can *feel* the meaning better

when I say it this way. I think the reason is that it is harder for me to apply any 'substance' or 'appearance' to a *difference* than to a 'presence'. Or to put it another way: The difference between presence (consciousness) and absence (unconsciousness) is phenomena. This too allows me to see more clearly that 'presence' or 'consciousness' is without any substance and cannot stand on its own, because it is a *difference made by phenomena* (which in turn depend on that difference for their being phenomena).

An alleged change of consciousness is always a change of phenomena. When, for example, my seeing changes, then actually *the seen* has changed for me. When there is no change of the seen, one cannot speak of a change of seeing. To go blind, for example, is strictly speaking a loss of visual phenomena and *not* a loss of *consciousness of* visual phenomena. The latter somehow implies a kind of separability which allows for *unseen* visual phenomena, just as if consciousness could be *added* and *subtracted* to/from phenomena while they remain phenomena, regardless of that assumed coming and going of consciousness. But, in order to 'add' consciousness, one has to 'add' phenomena and, in order to 'subtract' consciousness, one has to 'subtract' phenomena. So there is no consciousness apart from the difference between 'phenomena' and 'no phenomena'.

With that in mind, I think I can understand when you say: "...in regard to the five aggregates the 'hidden dimension' is nothing but the consciousness itself." Consciousness is hidden insofar as it is not a phenomenon.

Neither my nor other people's eyes 'see'. There are no experiencers. Experience is not portioned amongst different individuals. An individual, as far as it appears, is a phenomenon (internal or external). And *all* phenomena are 'within' experience, which is singular. Heads are not containers of experiences, be they internal ('my' head) or external ('others' heads). Heads are phenomena themselves. No individual contains hidden within itself any experience. If someone tells me that he has a neck pain, then this doesn't mean that, apart from this *told pain*, 'the real pain' is going on 'in him' or 'hidden from me'. There is no pain apart from *manifestation of* pain, be it 'verbal' (as an example of external bodily pain) or 'in my neck' (bodily pain internal). The same applies to any other so called 'mental' states or events. However it still feels that I miss or deny

something important, without knowing what it is. Maybe it is *rūpa* (as *rūpa*) again. Please correct me if you think that I'm wrong.

You say: "...you can try regarding the consciousness (internal and external) as a *direction* of a present thing." Is it possible for you to explain what you mean by 'direction'? This term is not very clear to me.

You say: "...if you take the approach of the six-sense-bases, the relationship of the base corresponding consciousnesses with each other is external." Is it external because the sense-bases and the corresponding consciousnesses can operate independently from each other, i.e. the 'loss' of a sense-base and the corresponding consciousness does not affect the consciousnesses corresponding to the other sense-bases?

This leads me to the following problem: Although I understand the interdependence of consciousness and phenomena, I cannot see why consciousness necessarily requires a sense-base. The dependence of consciousness on phenomena (and *vice versa*) is, in a sense, self-evident and essential. But, for example, that my seeing depends on an eye appears neither self-evident nor essential to me. I can, without any problem, imagine a world where such a relation between my seeing and an eye does not exist, but I cannot imagine a world where consciousness is without phenomena or phenomena without consciousness. Why does consciousness not only depend on its content but also on a sense-base? The latter dependence seems to be totally non-essential, like something that also could be otherwise. But could it be otherwise? If not, why not? I can spend my whole life without knowing that I have a brain. So why is a brain needed at all? What is an unknown brain? It's the old problem: How can I say that my seeing depends on an eye if that very eye cannot be said to exist until it has appeared? It seems I cannot get over this problem (despite our past correspondence).

Whenever and wherever I try to close the leak or gap, it appears elsewhere. Either a belief is required or facts must be denied. Reality is an unexplainable absurdity. It seems to resist any attempt to understand it. I would like to throw it away if I could. Just let it be and never touch it again. But I can't. This incapability is so painful. It's like a fever or fire in the body. The problem is that there is no escape. One can avoid contact with women, but not with reality. It is always there, pressing and urging. It is impossible to meditate in that state. After a few breaths the "hows"

and “whys” appear in a way that leaves no room for a rest. Also doubts come up: What if there is a reality behind experience, which determines the experience and all of ‘my’ actions? This is absolutely paralyzing. How can ‘I’ do anything if that ‘thing’ is doing anything? *How can I live ‘the holy life’ if I cannot even refute and disprove such a possibility?* But however much I try to get rid of this kind of doubt, I cannot attain certainty. The problem is that this kind of doubt *undermines* my ability to act, because it is *about* my ability to act. Everything could be determined ‘behind the scenes’, so there is no action possible. And that kills everything. This is the worst hindrance I ever came across. It says: “You cannot remove the hindrance, because you cannot act. It only seems so. Everything is decided behind the scenes.” Māra’s perfect weapon, so to speak.

Despite this problem, I still have hope and I trust in the Buddha, otherwise I could not fight against it. I just don’t see how to succeed. If you have any advice with regard to such kind of doubt, I would be happy to hear it.

[M. 59]

12 April 2011

I just want to add something to my main letter which might be relevant. I said that I regard consciousness (or existence or presence) as the *difference* between ‘phenomena’ and ‘no phenomena’. Now I realize that this is just a long-winded way of formulating a *denial* of consciousness (or existence or presence), because the difference between ‘phenomena’ and ‘no phenomena’ is, of course, *phenomena*. So according to my definition, *consciousness = phenomena*, which is certainly not what the Buddha taught. I *always* (mis)conceived consciousness in this way! I think this has something to do with its negative nature. Since it does not appear, I regarded it as *nothing*, because I could not grasp it. Why mention a ‘nothing’ additional to phenomena? Why not just say ‘phenomena’? So it is certainly no wonder that I always arrive at the same point and the same frustration.

I was lucky to stumble across a philosopher’s weblog³⁵ shortly after I wrote my first letter to you. He wrote:

“to say something exists—is simply to acknowledge it
that is to focus on it
and perhaps further to characterize it
therefore:
existence is reference
apart from this the concept has no content—it is open—or empty
the concept of existence as such is a concept without focus—therefore
it refers—quite ironically—to nothing
p.s.
to assert ‘x’ and to assert ‘x exists’—is to what?
reassert ‘x’?
it is as it were to underline ‘x’
to assert existence is not to add anything
it is to mark ‘x’
to give it focus
it is to pick it out”

This helped me, especially when I replace ‘existence’ with ‘consciousness’. Consciousness as reference (to *rūpa* by means of *nāma*), as ‘picking out’ or ‘marking’ or ‘underlining’ *that which is already there*, seems very convincing to me at the moment. And it also makes more understandable for me *why sense-organs are required* (contrary to my main letter where this was totally obscure to me).

Since this is all very fresh I cannot say more at the moment. I only want to add that it seems to me more and more that an *idealistic* approach to the Buddha’s teaching is wrong. Even the most naive or direct realism (not materialism) seems to be closer to the truth and a better starting point, since it doesn’t assume that the world is created when I open my eyes. Consciousness creates nothing, it adds nothing, it only ‘acknowledges’ (refers to) what is ‘there’. Do you agree?

I can also see how difficult it must be for another person to see my mistake, since I always tried to use the correct terminology but with an alternative meaning. *Redefining* terms (“He must be wrong, I know better”), as I did in my last letter, can be an alarm signal. I think it was one in my case.

PS. I'm sorry in case my 'emotional rollercoaster' with all these long and contradictory letters is somehow 'too much'.

[M. 60]

13 April 2011

I'm sorry to write again, but it seems that—for the first time—I got a glimpse of the real meaning of the Sabba Sutta³⁶ (with regard to the topic of our former correspondence). When I ask myself why the Buddha did not include consciousness (and the other aggregates), it seems clear to me now: *Because consciousness cannot be found*. It does not exist (in the sense of a thing). No one has ever encountered consciousness, neither internally nor externally. There are only eyes and forms, ears and sounds, etc. This was a little shocking, because the world appears to be empty in an unexpected sense. Like a puppet show. All beings refer to objects and are 'conscious' in that sense, but no-one contains 'mental images' of things.

I only want to add this, because I think it was this what you meant when you said: "in regard to the five aggregates the 'hidden dimension' is nothing but the consciousness itself. [...] External consciousness is not more hidden than the internal one, and none of them *appears* in itself."

[M. 61]

15 April 2011

I hope it is not impolite to write a fourth letter before receiving the answers to the other three, but I just want to spare you the trouble to write more than necessary. The doubt and frustration uttered in the first letter are resolved (but I'm still interested to hear your answers regarding the other topics). The second and third letters require no answer (but feel free to comment on whatever you want, and in case your answer is already written, I will receive it happily).

I don't really know what has happened. The tremendous tension of the last weeks left me and I see more clearly than before. It is not as if I have done something or grasped something, but rather as if it has revealed itself. The doubts and questions somehow cannot enter. And when I force

myself to bring them to the fore, they somehow appear as meaningless, because it seems that they don't relate to anything 'real'.

You said that external consciousness is not more hidden than the internal one, and none of them *appears* in itself. I 'combined' this with the Sabba Sutta, i.e. I asked myself why the 'All' only comprises the senses and their corresponding objects. And this combination somehow allowed me to see what 'existence' means and also the indirect nature of the aggregates. It is impossible to understand the Sabba Sutta with common sense (though it appears as very easy to do so), because common sense believes that the eye sees the forms, the ear hears the sounds, etc. In other words: Common sense regards the internal as subject and the external as object, which messes everything up hopelessly. 'The All' is that which is given in the sense of the experience as a whole. The trouble is that the term 'experience' can easily lead to confusion, because it has the flavour of subjectivity, which might lead one to the assumption that 'the All' is not 'given' but somehow 'experienced' from the outside, i.e. that 'the All' is 'my' experience. The aggregates cannot be understood in the same way, so they are not mentioned in that Sutta, i.e. none of the aggregates can be shown separately. They can only be distinguished 'within' that which is given as that which constitutes it. There is no *rūpa* alone to be found nor *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhārā* alone nor *viññāṇa* alone. A colour, for example, can only be found *at* or *on* *rūpa*, while at the same time only *coloured rūpa* can be seen, and that seeing also has no own life, since it is *of* or *about* 'coloured *rūpa*'.

Very important for me was the topic of 'others'. Now I understand how they can be real without being experiencers. That is a very strange feeling. It feels creepy in an indescribable way but at the same time it has the taste of total freedom. The meaning of 'the world is empty' appears to be clear. It is not about (things in) the world, it is about experiencers. There are no experiencers, neither internal nor external, but internal and external are not touched by this. There is no need to arrive at a 'non-duality' of 'internal' and 'external'.

But I am only at the beginning. It feels as if I have 'just arrived' at the train station where my train is waiting which *will* take me further. Quite a lot of dreams about heaven, monks (including myself as a monk) and 'signs' (an image where the animal realm was finally closed) accompanied

this process. But I still hesitate to believe in any attainment. It just feels stupid and even dangerous to think about myself as 'noble'. I think you know what I mean. I just wanted to tell you. Maybe it is 'nothing', but it really feels like 'something'. But I was deeply fooled often enough in my life, especially by certain appearances, so I think it is better not to think about this in terms of 'attainment'. Nothing good can spring from such thoughts.

Without your help I would not have these insights now. I cannot say how much I thank you. And if you see any error or delusion, please don't hesitate to correct me. I am open to critique.

[N. 50]

16 April 2011

No need to apologize for the emotional roller-coasters, they are the sign of hard work. I'm pleased to see that things are unraveling themselves to some extent.

I was literally half-way through replying to your previous letters. I am glad to hear that the deliberate act of doubting doesn't reach you anymore, and if you suspect that it might, then keep doubting until the meaninglessness of the doubt completely prevails and then even a thought of forcing yourself to doubt leaves you. You don't have to bother yourself with the ideas of attainments, they are secondary, just make sure you board that train and go where it takes you. As a matter of fact even the ideas of attainments will gradually be redefined, since they originated from the old views of 'me' and 'others'. This can be done by focusing on the insights, not whether they are real or not (and Māra will for sure throw a doubtful thought now and then. If you persist, he will go away). The point is that, whether it feels as 'something' or if you discover that it is 'nothing', you still know what to do and keep doing it.

You say: "It is not about (things in) the world, it is about experiencers." This is indeed so. When you see that there is no Self whether here (me) or there (others), all that is left is arising and ceasing of the aggregates fueled by desire (until one is completely liberated). And even in others, who still think that they are, in terms of Selves, there is only arising and

ceasing of the aggregates, fueled by desire too, it's just that they are completely ignorant of that.

I think you understood correctly what I meant by consciousness in our recent correspondence. The point I was trying to make was that the things are already there, in your experience, whether you acknowledge them or not is not important. They arise of their own accord and they cease of their own accord. And indeed no one can encounter consciousness; when they do they encounter a phenomenon which is always the five aggregates. That's why any of the five aggregates actually belong more to the thing than to you. Consciousness, by its inherent non-appearance, is the most difficult to see in this light. I say 'see', but it is probably more accurate to say 'know'—one doesn't see consciousness, whether as mine or not mine, one knows that things appear because of the five aggregates and none of them belongs to one. Keep pursuing that insight of the emptiness of the world, in the sense we discussed, and see where it takes you. The lack of a master of the puppets should bring relief, since one realizes that things are beyond one's control not because one doesn't know how to control them and what to do; no, they are beyond one's control because one *cannot* control them, in a fundamental sense. Even the idea of control is beyond one's control.

You asked in your second letter: "Consciousness creates nothing, it adds nothing, it only 'acknowledges' (refers to) what is 'there'. Do you agree?" Acknowledging or referring to is indeed an act of consciousness, but it is a reflexive act which presupposes that which is acknowledged. That presupposed thing is also a conscious phenomenon, a thing, which if you look closely also refers to (i.e. presupposes) another, subtler, phenomenon, and so on *ad infinitum*. The act of acknowledgement thus doesn't come from you, nor from the consciousness, nor from one's reflexive powers. It comes from the thing itself, or even more precisely: with the arising of a thing on the immediate level, the potential of acknowledgement arises simultaneously; with ceasing, it ceases too. In other words a thing is that which is *there*, as a whole, acknowledgement and that which is presupposed by it are within it.

And even further, the act of acknowledgement or, since we are on much subtler levels now than the passage you quoted from a philosopher's blog, the act of *determining*, requires a determination. (Loosely speaking, you

can think of *saṅkhāra* as that ‘potential of acknowledgement’, and *cetanā* as the actual acknowledgement in a sense of a reference.) And the determination is also determined by that which determines, since if there is nothing to be determined, the determining would not exist. It all depends on the direction of your attention. And even that ‘direction’ of one’s attention is already given beforehand (structurally not temporally). What I am trying to say is that even the most voluntary and deliberate actions are *not yours*; they are already there and what you can do is attend to certain given aspects within the framework of the present experience, but even that attention is already included in that framework—you cannot *create* anything...

Feel free to write if any further questions arise, or if certain things need further clarifying. I will reply as soon as I can.

[M. 62]

29 April 2011

Not long after I wrote my last letter to you, that deliberate act of doubting came back, maybe worse than ever before. I was able to alleviate it again, but I did not arrive at the same ‘conclusion’ again.

I regarded the experience as something ‘*universal*’ (as opposed to *individual*). But now this seems questionable. The experience as a whole seems not universal (despite its ‘wholeness’) but entirely individual, since its occurrence depends on ‘this body’. Whatever appears does so in dependence on senses, *which ‘I’ don’t share with anyone*. And that means that we don’t share the ‘same world’, be it a material world or a ‘universal experience which contains all of us’. There is no such thing as ‘universal (supra-individual) experience’ which somehow ‘contains’ all individuals. ‘Bare matter’ or ‘the internal of an other’ forever remain ‘beyond’ or ‘outside’, i.e. unreachable as such, but that doesn’t mean—as far as I can see—that they can be denied, since we actually experience ‘the foreign’.

Is it possible to say something with regard to this topic? There seems to be a very fine line between understanding and misunderstanding, but near enough is not good enough.

I think I am able to answer my last letter by myself. There is still a strong tendency in me to regard *rūpa* as ‘experience’ or ‘appearance’, but I begin to realize that the experience has a *real, i.e. material basis*, which is *rūpa*. *Rūpa* is ‘at the bottom’, so to speak, with nothing ‘below’. *Rūpa* (as *nāmarūpa*) is manifest or appears or reveals itself as ‘the All’ (Sabba Sutta). The presence or ‘visibleness’ of that ‘self-luminous manifestation’ is *viññāṇa*. All this happens to no-one. (I can feel what that means, it has a certain ‘taste’.) It is an empty play. That doesn’t mean that it is an illusion. It is real but mistaken for something which it is not.

So it seems that the ‘real material basis’ was the stumbling block again. It is quite interesting that, after removing ‘real matter’, Paul Debes and others were in need to *substitute* it with something else in order to ‘explain’ the ‘persistence’ of the experience which was now without its fundament. Their solution: “Latent tendencies,” “mental forces” and “one’s former actions.” I think it is quite odd to deny ‘real matter’ as the basis of experience (because of its alleged ‘hidden nature’) and then to come up with ‘invisible immaterial forces’. But maybe I am too harsh and just misunderstood what they taught.

Please feel free to also answer my last letter if you want. I am still interested in your opinion. If you think that I am mistaken (with this one), please correct me.

Thank-you for your letter. You mentioned in your letter before the last that you regarded the experience as something ‘universal’ as opposed to ‘individual’. I think that your former confusion might have arisen from using these terms as mutually exclusive. The point is that, when both ‘individuality’ and ‘universality’ (or generality) are free from the notions of Self, they are not exclusive, on the contrary they refer to the same thing. One’s individuality is universal, or to put it differently: by understanding universal characteristics of one’s experience (i.e. by seeing the generality of the experience), one becomes an individual. It is only when the notion of Self creeps in, even temporarily, that these terms become counterparts. Thus, although all of one’s experience depends upon one’s senses, those very senses are there in the ‘universal’ world, which one has no control of, yet one’s individuality directly depends upon it. Living your life ‘universally’, and by that I mean not regarding things as neither ‘mine’ nor ‘their’s’, means being an individual. That’s how an *arahat*, by practising for his own welfare, brings welfare to others.

You have a point in your second letter when you said: “All this happens to no-one (I can feel what that means, it has a certain ‘taste’). It is an empty play. That doesn’t mean that it is an illusion. It is real but mistaken for something which it is not.”

I have never read Paul Debes, but the tendency of replacing the matter with something else, which would serve as an explanation of the experience, is quite common in many people. This is because the centre of their experience still rests upon the notions of the Self, despite their views and ideas of not-self that they read about in the Suttas. When the actual experience is affected, for example in the contemplation of the material basis of all phenomena, their Self will have to fill that vacuum created by mistakenly completely removing the matter out of the picture (as opposed to leaving it there as it was, but seeing it as impermanent). Ironically enough even this ‘vacuum’, that their misconceived notion of matter has created, is also a thing and as such it also has its material basis. Thus, rather than trying to trace their wrong views from the moment of origin, rather than comparing them and learning *about* them, all those people have to do is *see a present thing* (or recognize the phenomenon)

because, whatever that thing may be (a view, an idea, the sense experience), fundamentally it is always the five aggregates.

[M. 64]

10 May 2011

You say: “Thus, although all of one’s experience depends upon one’s senses, those very senses are there in the ‘universal’ world, which one has no control of, yet one’s individuality directly depends upon it.”

Would it be correct when I regard ‘one’s experience’ as ‘one’s being in the world’? Because then it makes sense, because I am in the world only by means of this body (senses) and this body is there in the ‘universal’ world etc.

My problem is that—for me—terms like ‘experience’, ‘consciousness’, ‘perception’ sound like ‘in me’ or ‘(only) in the mind’ or ‘mental representation (of the real thing)’, i.e. like ‘virtual’ as opposed to, or in addition to ‘real’. This meaning creeps in again and again, but as far as I can see it is wrong. For example: When the Suttas say that eye-consciousness depends on the eye and forms, my immediate reaction to the term ‘consciousness’ is that the eye is a button which is pressed by the form and then ‘consciousness’ appears as a ‘virtual reality’ in addition to the eye and the forms. I think this is the ‘normal’ understanding (‘realism/materialism’). The idealistic alternative is that the eye and the forms are *within* that ‘virtual reality’, i.e. they are only ‘in the mind’ or ‘mental’, and that is what Paul Debes taught, according to my understanding of his writings. My own (tottering) understanding is that consciousness in that sense does not exist at all. It is not a ‘mental’ or ‘virtual’ image of a ‘real thing’, no ‘output’ of the senses or brain. Instead of this, I regard it as one’s (real, not virtual) being in the world and, since this being in the world depends on the body or senses, it must be said with the Suttas that ‘eye-consciousness’ (= being in the world as eye) depends on the eye and the forms etc. And if that is true, the common translation of the Suttas leads people like me astray because it was done by people who did not know what these texts are about. But maybe I’m wrong. My understanding changes sometimes very rapidly. I waste a lot of paper, writing down every thought which appears important, but I think that I

still cannot rely on most of them, not to mention the emotions which sometimes accompany these thoughts—only straw fires.

Would you agree with my understanding of ‘sense-consciousness’ as ‘being in the world by means of the senses’ instead of ‘mental output of the senses/brain’? I would think that I am not in a mental representation of the world but in the world itself. Or better: I think that I *should* think so, because I *feel* different (like encapsulated in a ‘dream’ or ‘virtual reality’, searching for a ‘real outside’ or fear such an ‘outside’ because it could be in control of ‘my dream’ so that I can’t do anything).

[N. 52]

24 May 2011

One’s experience is one’s being in the world. There is no difference between these two terms, since one’s experience directly depends upon the world, i.e. one is experiencing the world and that is one’s being.

—“My problem is that—for me—terms like ‘experience’, ‘consciousness’, ‘perception’ sound like ‘in me’ or ‘(only) in the mind’ or ‘mental representation (of the real thing)’, i.e. like ‘virtual’ as opposed or in addition to ‘real’.”

The main point here is to note that whether it is a ‘virtual’ aspect of one’s experience or ‘real’ aspect that we are talking about, *both* are just aspects of one’s being in the world. This is due to the fundamental nature of the experience as a whole, whereby the world (the All, *nāmarūpa*) has two sides to it: resistance and designation (or material and mental, real and imaginary, and many other different pairs that come with the wrong views). (The point is that they all originate from this fundamental characteristic of *nāmarūpa*—the principle is real, it is only that with the lack of understanding people attach different significance to them.) Thus, whether it is virtual, whether it ‘feels’ like being ‘in’ you as opposed to ‘outside’ of you, these things exist as such within the experience as a whole, and no matter how subtle their imaginary side can become, they will *always require* ‘matter’ for its appearing. And *vice versa* too, no matter how coarse and material certain experience can be, it can never be ‘completely material’ without its designation aspect—matter requires consciousness. Thus the form, the eye and the eye-consciousness are all

there *in the world*, and only because they are there can you think of, and experience, certain things as ‘virtual’, ‘real’ and so on.

—“my immediate reaction to the term ‘consciousness’ is that the eye is a button which is pressed by the form and then ‘consciousness’ appears as a ‘virtual reality’ in addition to the eye and the forms. I think this is the ‘normal’ understanding (‘realism/materialism’).”

This is quite correct. Ven. Ñāṇavīra was talking about it and yes, often the way the Dhamma is presented (and translated) doesn’t go beyond the *puthujjana*’s worldly views.

—“My own (tottering) understanding is that consciousness in that sense does not exist at all.”

Yes, and this can also be said for the rest of the aggregates, provided that by that we mean: “not exist at all—as *mine*.”

—“Would you agree with my understanding of ‘sense-consciousness’ as ‘being in the world by means of the senses’ instead of ‘mental output of the senses/brain’? I would think that I am not in a mental representation of the world but in the world itself.”

Absolutely. The view of sensations, inputs/outputs, etc. is a product of a scientific approach to one’s experience, an approach which will never lead to understanding. As far as your concern about being in the mental representation of the world goes, just see that representation as directly depending upon the world it represents—in that way it will cease to bear any significance at all. As soon as you forget this direct dependence, that ‘virtual world’ or ‘mental representation’ will draw the value to itself again, as a result of which its counterpart ‘real’ or ‘outside’ world will originate (and *vice versa*, if you forget that the ‘outer world’ requires the world (*loka*) as such, its counterpart in the form of an ‘inner world’ will come to haunt you). It is all a matter of mindfulness and patience, because with these matters it is not enough to see them once or twice for what they are. You have to keep repeating the ‘sights’ of understanding, because wrong view is a *habit* which needs to be undone.

[M. 65]

24 May 2011

I am in some serious mental difficulties. I cannot stop thinking. It is consuming me. It's like a whirl in my head, which robs all my energy. The environment 'happens' only in the background. I feel like a zombie. The problem is: I am on the verge of losing the belief in my ability to act. It might sound strange, but I feel the need for a Self! How can I stop thinking, if there is no control? How can I even raise my arm? How can I sit down and meditate without the conviction that I can do so (I mean I, not some 'remote-controlled puppet')? I try to convince myself of my freedom to act because, without that freedom, there is no action. But I do not succeed. There is the fear of being fooled by some 'hidden factors', which create the illusion of a doer or the illusion of a conviction that things are so-and-so while they aren't.

Is it possible to say something with regard to this problem? I'm sorry if it is not very much related to your answer, but I'm somehow 'paralyzed' at the moment. The confusion seems to be not only about self and individual but also about the distinction between an individual and a 'robot'. *Why is it not possible that consciousness is just a 'passive display' without the possibility to modify or influence the happenings on the 'screen' (like in a movie where all the actions of people are only recorded actions which can no longer be altered, neither from the inside nor from the outside of the movie)?* That seems to be the crucial point. *There must be an indivisible connection between choice/freedom and consciousness, otherwise the fatalism of Makkhali Gosāla³⁷ is possible.* And that would be the end for me. But where is this connection? I cannot see it.

[N. 53]

6 June 2011

Let me get straight to the point:

—"I feel like a zombie. The problem is: I am on the verge of losing the belief in my ability to act. It might sound strange, but I feel the need for a Self! How can I stop thinking, if there is no control?"

The only way to not think is to get absorbed in the second *jhāna*. Apart from that 'stopping to think' is not possible. It's just that people don't

realize this, they don't see the inherent lack of control of their existence, so they deceive themselves into believing that they are actually masters of it. You cannot stop thinking, because it is not *you* who thinks. Thinking is existence, and wishing not to think is the same as wishing not to exist. And actually it is not thinking that bothers you—it is your urge to stop that which you know is unstoppable. Just leave it, and stop trying to stop it—losing the belief in an ability to act will let the action take care of itself.

—“How can I even raise my arm? How can I sit down and meditate without the conviction that I can do so (I mean *I*, not some ‘remote-controlled puppet’)?”

Again, *you* cannot raise your arm. The arm can raise itself. Is there anything wrong in feeling like a ‘remote-controlled puppet’, if that experience liberates you from suffering? Remember when Ven. Ñāṇavīra compared the experience of an *arahat* to the automatic system which maintains itself.

—“I try to convince myself of my freedom to act, because without that freedom there is no action.”

This is true. However the freedom you are referring to is a *puthujjana*’s freedom and this is more of a condemnation to action than true freedom from suffering: he is free to act, but he is not free not to act (i.e. not acting is also an action). That’s why the Buddha teaches the abandoning of action at its root, which consequently means the abandoning of this kind of condemned freedom.

It seems that you need to contemplate the faith or trust (*saddha*) aspect of the practice. You realize that there is no owner or master of action, but at the same time you are afraid of completely letting go of that fake master which is your Self. You lack trust in that ‘remote-controlled puppet’ because it looks like it will destroy you. It will indeed—it will destroy your Self, but not *yourself*.

—“*Why is it not possible that consciousness is just a ‘passive display’ without the possibility to modify or influence the happenings on the ‘screen’ ...?*”

Because that leaves the intention out. All you have to do is to *include* a viewer into that whole picture of watching the movie in a cinema. In that sense you will be able to say that consciousness is an ‘active display’, which is nevertheless still beyond one’s control. To put it even more directly: fundamentally you have no control over your control, but that

doesn't mean that control as a phenomenon doesn't exist. It does, but you cannot control it.

—“*There must be an indivisible connection between choice/freedom and consciousness, otherwise the fatalism of Makkhali Gosāla is possible. And that would be the end for me. But where is this connection? I cannot see it.*”

The connection is in the fact that there is *no separation* between the two. You seem to regard your choice/intention as something different from consciousness, which is somehow there ‘on the movie screen’. This is not the case, and the only reason that you can choose in the first place, is because you are conscious of the possibilities which are there to choose from. Choice is an intentional intention (a movement) along those already given conscious intentions (i.e. possibilities).

The difference between the *arahat*’s automated experience and Makkhali Gosāla’s fatalism (or any fatalism) lies in the fact that the *arahat*’s automatic action manifests itself *through* his responsibility which, because he is an *arahat*, doesn’t cause him any suffering whatsoever. Fatalism on the other hand pushes the notion of the inherent lack of control to the extreme, in order to deny everything in an attempt of *avoiding* the responsibility for one’s actions. Fatalism cannot extinguish the suffering caused by the discrepancy of human existence, whereby you are responsible for that which you cannot control. This is why fatalism, in the vain hope of abolishing suffering, ends up abolishing the responsibility.

[M. 66]

16 June 2011

[Re. para. 5:] But isn’t the inclusion of a viewer the inclusion of a subject or self? I always try to carefully avoid any ‘viewer’. Maybe this is part of the problem.

[Re. para. 2:] No, there is nothing wrong in feeling like such a ‘puppet’, if that experience would liberate me from suffering. But if I suppose that everything happens automatically even *right now*, i.e. *before* liberation, then I feel paralyzed. It is like saying: The liberation will happen when the conditions are right, and the conditions will be right when other conditions are right and so on *ad infinitum*. Such a ‘chain’ or ‘structure’ of events is not open. I see no freedom therein. In order for freedom to exist,

my actions (and also myself) must be gratuitous, unnecessary, optional in the sense that they are *allowed* but *not required*. I must be the stranger in this world in order to be free. My very existence must be a contingency, i.e. there must not be any necessity of it. That's why and how I'm free. There is a chasm between me and the world, i.e. I am (in a sense) not of the world and its 'laws'. The world ends in front of my eyes, so to speak.

This seems to be the point where the above mentioned 'viewer' comes into play, because the world is always the 'other side', the counterpart of me. The world is always 'positive' or 'opaque', in the sense that it is 'something'. I think this is *nāmarūpa*. And here seems to lie my problem: I also ascribe *subjectivity* and *consciousness* to the 'other side', i.e. I deny *one half* of my experience, because I cannot find anything there. There certainly also is nothing to find there, but the phenomenal world has an *end* or *surface*, which automatically makes it only one half and implies another half, which is 'me' and consciousness. Another point is that phenomena are always somehow extended, which means that there are directions or dimensions into which they extend. 'Towards me' is such a direction or dimension. Maybe this could be called the 'existential dimension' or consciousness? But 'towards *me*' is influence of *avijjā*, because there is *no end* of that dimension, i.e. one will never reach 'something' when following this direction 'inwards'—or in other words: it has an *open end*. Maybe this is the infinitude of consciousness?

Back to freedom again: My independence or freedom is only that of a parasite. I am not an integral or necessary part of the 'world' I live in, but I cannot *be* without it. Freedom and anxiety seem to be related: I think the question 'What shall I do?' is an example of that.

When I started writing this letter I didn't know how it would end. In the beginning it seemed I would disagree with you, regarding freedom, but now it feels more like an agreement. I also feel a bit relieved. But I know the 'enemy' is still in the background. You helped me again to clarify my thoughts. Thank-you!

You asked: “But isn’t the inclusion of a viewer the inclusion of a subject or self?” When I said ‘viewer’ I have been referring to the intentionality of experience. You’ve been talking about a ‘passive display’ on the screen ‘in front of you’; so using the same analogy I’ve tried to point out that even that ‘you’, which looks at the screen, is also part of the picture (i.e. the experience as a whole). I might have said it before, but that *thing* which is Self exists, it’s just that one has to realize that it doesn’t belong to one. When Self is not *mine*, it cannot be called ‘Self’, since one’s Self depends upon the appropriation of oneself.

You wrote: “But if I suppose that everything happens automatically even *right now*, i.e. *before* liberation, then I feel paralyzed.” As I have said, it is *you* who feels and who would feel paralyzed. Being able to let things go (i.e. arise and cease and persist of their own accord) includes letting go of one’s own paralysis. (That doesn’t mean that the paralysis is not there, it means that it doesn’t bother you.) When one learns how to act in this way, one is learning how to act from non-Self. If you still find the experience of that paralysis overwhelming, try to see that even paralysis which is caused by the automated action is also an *automated action*. Even when you cannot act because the experience is too much—that is also an act. It is not possible, within the scope of normal experience (i.e. excluding deep states of *samādhi*) to not act. What is possible is to replace an action originating from Self, with the one which originates from non-Self. In this case, when compared to the former, the latter type of action cannot even be called an action and it is in this way that the Buddha teaches the liberation from any action whatsoever.

[Re. para. 3:] I’m not sure I completely understand what you mean here. Do you mind clarifying it further, before I say anything upon it?

You also wrote: “Freedom and anxiety seem to be related: I think the question ‘What shall I do?’ is an example of that.” Indeed. Anxiety arises with the recognition of the fact that you are free. Freedom in its heart requires the fundamental lack of control.

Some of my views or ideas about certain things change quite often, so the following 'clarification' is actually more like an 'update'. At the moment I regard consciousness as a negation or limitation of matter (substance). Due to that negation, matter has a surface and that surface is the appearance. Similar to the mass of water of the ocean which does not extend into infinity, but has an end and therefore a surface. So the appearance is between matter and consciousness, i.e. both are required for the appearance to occur. Instead of 'matter' and 'consciousness' one could also say (within this context) 'being' and 'nothingness'. While the appearance or surface depends on two, matter and consciousness, matter and consciousness are only revealed through that surface: matter as its carrier which is always 'behind' or 'below' it, and consciousness 'in front' or 'above' of it as negation or 'end' of matter, i.e. of that which is 'behind' or 'below'. I hope I can make myself a bit clearer now. If you think that I have made a mistake, please correct me.

I see what you mean now. The surface of the phenomenal world is a phenomenon and the same can be said about that which is below that surface. *Any* aspect of the phenomenal world is a phenomenon (and the phenomenal world is too), so the distinction between the surface and that which is below and above is not quite accurate (unless I misunderstood you). The same applies to the division of being and nothingness (Sartre has similar views)—on the mundane scale it can be used to describe the nature of one's experience more correctly than, say, anything that psychology or psychotherapy has to offer. However, when it comes to trying to understand the Dhamma, it is not enough. 'Nothing' is an absence of 'something', or 'nothing' is 'something' which is not here. Both 'nothing' and 'something' are *present* in one's experience; you can recognize them both, describe them and distinguish them. Indeed 'nothing' is negation, like consciousness, but these two don't share the same fundamental nature. As I said, 'nothing' is already something, something absent, or less present. Thus 'something' and 'nothing' are 'present' and 'less present' and both are within the domain of being. Consciousness on the other hand is that very *presence*, which encompasses both 'present' and 'less present' (or present and absent). It can help you understand this if you start thinking in terms of determined-determination (*sankhata-saṅkhāra*), rather than being and nothingness.

'Matter' will never appear, nor will consciousness. What appears is the appearance, which *requires* both matter and consciousness. Neither 'matter' nor 'consciousness' are revealed through that appearance (in the sense that you can see them). It is more accurate to say that they are *indicated* through it, which makes it possible to *know* that they are there to *understand* the dependence by understanding the *indication* (*saṅkhāra*). That's why full understanding completely frees oneself from any experience whatsoever. And also that is why the understanding is directly opposed to *avijjā*. *Avijjā* is that very *lack of knowledge* in regard to appearance which, once known, cannot be forgotten again. Does this make sense? The simile of the ocean you gave seems to be too neat, as if you have painted a picture in front of you which will contain and explain

everything... everything but your *dukkha*. Again, I might have misunderstood what you wanted to say, in which case forgive me.

It's always important to remember that there is no suffering *without* craving, and there is no craving *without* suffering. These two truly convey the *akālika* sense of dependence, hence they are the core of the Buddha's Teaching ("One who sees the Dhamma, sees the dependent origination, one who sees the dependent origination sees the Dhamma"³⁸). Thus, whatever presents itself as the reason of your suffering, it isn't—it is because of the presence of craving that the suffering is present; lack of understanding just makes one think that this or that is why he suffers. That's why pursuing and resolving this or that never freed anyone from *dukkha*, but the abolishing of craving certainly did.

I had difficulties to answer your letter. Whatever I say seems to be just a repetition of something I already said in the past. I'm tired of it. Even if my thoughts are 'correct', they are still exposed to doubt. All my thinking circles around 'one' question: *How can I be sure, how can I go beyond doubt and skepticism, how is understanding possible?* I can hardly describe this state. I somehow feel 'disconnected' from the experience, unable to make sense of it. Everything seems possible, even a 'brain in a vat' scenario.³⁹ The experience doesn't tell me what I want to know. It doesn't tell me anything at all about its origin. I even hesitate to investigate further into that direction, since I don't know how to be sure in the first place that such an investigation is possible at all, not to mention a *successful* one. It seems there is *nothing left except one thing*: Relying on my faith and following (simple) instructions. I'm at a point where philosophy becomes impossible. Not that I cannot come up with various thoughts, but I cannot 'believe' them. It's really extreme. Even the most normal assumptions appear unreliable to me. *What do I really know? And how do I know it?* There is no way. What can be doubted or taken away by Alzheimer's disease is not knowledge. It's nothing. Suffering makes itself known, maybe by 'trying to understand'. But even this statement can be doubted. It's just a matter of perspective. Change it and everything crashes. I only 'know' there is 'something', but I don't really *know* that. There just *is* something. It is and is and is—increasingly and unavoidable. In the sense of 'pain is painful', which is consciousness or almost 'self-awareness' (not in the sense of pain as Self) of pain. It just means that it is unavoidable, i.e. there is no 'turning away', no escape. This whole 'something' is just a pain, even if pleasant, since it all has to be passively suffered, even the activity. But this is already too much for me to say, since I don't know *how* I can *make* such a statement. It seems that the fact that there is something, i.e. the fact of being is 'reflected' in being, like a 'shock'. Similar to when one looks in the mirror, sees oneself and, because of what one sees, changes one's facial expression which is immediately reflected in the mirror and so on, back and forth *ad infinitum*. I don't know if I can express myself properly to you, but I have to use 'my own language' here. There seems to be a 'self-awareness' of the experience by which the experience is

‘affected by itself’. ‘Self’ in ‘self-awareness’, not as ‘someone’, but because of its ‘unhidden nature’. This relieves me a bit, but at the moment I cannot dig deeper. I do not dare. This has to happen by itself somehow—as a ‘revelation’. Otherwise it’s just the ‘impossible knowledge’ which can be washed away so easily.

Would it be possible in principle to just mechanically follow the instructions regarding ethics and meditation until suffering is gone? I fear this will be my last resort. It might appear as contradiction to all my above-mentioned doubts and scepticism, but I somehow have a ‘built-in faith’ and devotion in/for the Buddha, which is not shaken by this. And this will prevent me from losing my mind over this.

(What follows below is from an earlier attempt to answer your letter. It should be read with the above in mind.)

—“I see what you mean now. The surface of the phenomenal world is a phenomenon, and the same can be said about that which is below that surface. Any aspect of the phenomenal world is a phenomenon (and the phenomenal world is too), so the distinction between the surface and that which is below and above is not quite accurate (unless I misunderstood you).”

No, I think your understanding is correct. When I wrote my last letter, that view (with the simile of the ocean) was the only available view that could give me a bit of relief (for a short time). But now it seems also ‘empty’ to me.

—“‘Nothing’ is an absence of ‘something’, or ‘nothing’ is ‘something’ which is not here. [...] Consciousness on the other hand is that very *presence*, which encompasses both ‘present’ and ‘less present’ (or present and absent)...”

I think I understand what you mean, but somehow the term ‘presence’ is not very clear to me. What is the difference in meaning between ‘X’ and ‘X is present’ or ‘X’ and ‘consciousness of X’? If we say ‘X’, there is no need to ‘add’ presence or consciousness to it, since it already is present/conscious (at least to a certain degree). But what does that mean: ‘present/conscious’? When I look at what the difference is between consciousness and no consciousness, I find phenomena are the difference, so consciousness can only mean ‘phenomena’ (with quotation marks), i.e.

not this or that phenomenon nor all phenomena together, but ‘phenomena’ *without* any further specification or details, like a wildcard. In other words: consciousness is left over when we disregard the ‘what’ of the phenomena, so only the ‘phenomenality of the phenomena’, without any specific ‘content’, is left over, which is consciousness or presence. Would you agree?

—“‘Matter’ will never appear, nor will consciousness. What appears is the appearance, which *requires* both matter and consciousness. Neither ‘matter’ nor ‘consciousness’ are revealed through that appearance (in the sense that you can see them). It is more accurate to say that they are *indicated* through it, which makes it possible to *know* that they are there—to *understand* the dependence by understanding, the *indication* (*saṅkhāra*). That’s why full understanding completely frees oneself from any experience whatsoever.”

I don’t understand the last sentence, especially the ‘That’s why’. Is it possible to explain it further?

—“The simile of the ocean you gave seems to be too neat, as if you have painted a picture in front of you which will contain and explain everything... everything but your *dukkha*.”

Yes, I agree. That simile says nothing about suffering, but that was also not the point of it (and that itself might be the mistake).

[N. 56]

31 August 2011

Your thoughts are indeed exposed to doubt, because ‘doubt’ is an *act* you can direct towards anything. Doubt originates from you and it is in regard to your thinking, and the point I’m trying to make is: although your thoughts are affected by doubt, are you affected by those doubting thoughts? In other words, doubt ‘belongs’ to things (thoughts) and the only reason that it affects you is because you *give in* to it internally. So don’t try to ‘clean’ the thoughts from doubt, try to find the place internally, where the existing doubt doesn’t cause you suffering. You can have an act of doubt, but that doesn’t justify it if your mind is overwhelmed by it.

Consequently the only doubt that matters is the one in regard to the four noble truths. And by that I mean, doubt in regard to the origin of the arisen suffering. Indeed, without having doubt regarding the origin of *dukkha*, that *dukkha* couldn't possibly manifest, hence the understanding of the four noble truths leads to the instant cessation of suffering. (Obviously this is something you have to keep repeating until that understanding is fully established, it's not enough to do it once.)

You said: "Even the most normal assumptions appear unreliable to me." There is no such thing as 'normal' assumption—every, the most certain of all, assumption is still unreliable by the very fact that it is *an assumption*, i.e. it has the nature of *upādāna*. This just shows you how uncertain and frail the thoroughly established world of the *puthujjana* is. The most obvious and solid things that are taken for granted are actually very insecure and impermanent. Sights, sounds, tastes, smells, etc.—the clear and self-explanatory things in the *puthujjana*'s world—begin to change, first by doubting, then hopefully by understanding.

"I only 'know' there is 'something', but I don't really *know* that. There just *is* something." Don't bother trying to reach the bottom or the first fundamental point of your knowledge—you will fail. You should know only that which is present and your suffering in relation to it, and then when that ceases you should know your *dukkha* in relation to the newly-arisen thing, and so on. All of the other urges and tendencies will have to be restrained. Think of it as the establishing of a balance, like a perfectly balanced seesaw, whereby if you don't give in to any particular side *dukkha* disappears. In this way suffering, and the absence of it, will become the criteria of your action (in the broadest sense of the word), whereby if *dukkha* increases with the certain act, you will naturally stop doing it. Keeping the precepts can be regarded as 'evening the ground' for your seesaw, so that the mind can easily control the balance.

You asked: "Would it be possible in principle to just mechanically follow the instructions regarding ethics and meditation until suffering is gone?" Yes, it would. It ties in with what I was saying above: you will have to restrain many urges, tendencies and inclinations, and just do that which you *know* you are supposed to.

(Reply to the second part of the letter:)

There is no difference between saying ‘X’ and ‘X is present’, you use the latter just to emphasize the point. ‘Consciousness of X’ usually stands for the reflexive presence of X (one is aware of X), but it should more correctly state ‘Consciousness of the conscious X (or presence of the present X) or ‘awareness of X’. You can’t really look at the difference between consciousness and no consciousness because, if there is no consciousness, the existence is not manifest at all, therefore any comparison is not possible. The same stands for consciousness—being “left over when we disregard ‘what’ of the phenomena”—it is impossible to even theorise about consciousness on its own terms (and the same for ‘matter’). It requires a phenomenon and even if you think of a simple presence, without any ‘content’, the *thought* of that very presence *is* its content—it is a thing that you are conscious of. Presence without that which is present is inconceivable. If you conceive it, you are conceiving the *idea* of it, which, if forgets that presence on its own cannot be and by doing so contradicts its own nature, is a wrong idea because it misrepresents the nature of things.

What I meant with “That’s why...” is that by understanding that which appears and that which is indicated through it, nothing remains that is not understood, and therefore (“that is why”) the suffering has no footing to arise. It was just a way to wrap the paragraph up.

[M. 69]

3 September 2011

My condition has improved a little bit, but I don’t know why and how long this will last.

You wrote: “So don’t try to ‘clean’ the thoughts from doubt, try to find the place internally, where the existing doubt doesn’t cause you suffering.” Is (within this context) ‘finding that place’ directly related to the practice of *samādhi*?

With “most normal assumptions” I also mean ‘assumptions’ like that one has a brain or lungs, etc. How can one be sure of that? I can’t. I have no way to prove that I have all these innards (at all times). The body of my experience is not the body of the physician. It is—in a sense—incomplete.

Also the thought occurred to me that the body is just an illusion, created by the overlapping of the six sense-fields. To me the senses are more like fields, not organs. I have never seen something with my eyes. It was always (in) this visual *field*. Maybe this is one of the reasons why I have trouble when the Buddha says that consciousness not only depends on the forms, the sounds, etc. but also on the eye, the ear, etc. We already talked about this but I must say that my seeing seems to depend *only* on the forms, since 'eye' (when seen) is also just a form or belongs to another sense-field. My point is: If seeing *always* depends on an eye, 'eye' must be *more* than just that which appears in the mirror or to the other senses, because I can see (at least in principle) without perceiving my eyes at all. Or in other words: If seeing always depends on an eye, the *matter* of that 'eye' must be independent of (its) appearance (as 'eye'). It might not be an 'eye' at all. So my question is: Is there a way to arrive at the conclusion *that seeing has a material basis* apart from perceiving an 'eye'? If our bodies would be shaped in a way that the senses could not 'touch' each other, could we still relate our perceptions to a 'material basis'? Could our experience still tell us (indirectly) that it depends on 'senses'? If experience is always sense-experience (i.e. has a material basis), I would suppose that its 'origin' should somehow be 'reflected', even if there is no *explicit* perception of sense-organs. I would suspect that the very fact that we cannot create (but only 'suffer') our experience, 'reflects' its 'material origin' (*anattā*), without necessarily telling us something more about this 'source'.

Maybe I'm wrong, but it seems to me now that the internal sense bases are not just the *explicitly* perceived 'organs', since consciousness depends on them *at all times*. I mean why should the Buddha tell us that seeing depends on the 'eyes'? This would be a little bit too much (unreliable) 'common sense' for my liking, since I can be 'surrounded by forms' without regarding myself as having 'eyeballs'. To tell me in such a situation that my seeing depends on them, would be of no help. But perhaps I'm a bit too hypersensitive with regard to these things.

After a long (and painful) time of pondering on the matter, I think I am now able to resolve my doubts. In case you are interested in the solution I write to you this letter.

All of the worst (i.e. most painful) skeptical scenarios require the *embeddedness* of one's experience (or one's self) in a higher-order 'environment' which is supposed to be *hidden* (i.e. not experienced). An example was the 'brain in a vat' scenario which I mentioned in my second-last letter. For me it was very important to realize that, even in the worst case, the 'world' would *contain both* 'me' *and* the 'hidden' higher-order environment, i.e. the 'highest level' is always the *world as a whole*. So whatever environment ('hidden' or not) is external to 'me', cannot be external to the world—nor can I (unless we use the term 'world' as counterpart of the I, which is not the case here). The world itself is of course neither 'internal' nor 'external', since it is the 'over-all situation'.

But there is another important point. And that is the structure or order of things in the world as a whole. All these sceptical scenarios are based on a fictional view of the world *from outside*. They fail to see that such a view is not possible or would reduce the 'world' to an 'environment' of that fictional observer, thereby requiring itself a world of higher order to *which the same doubt and scepticism would apply* (and so on *ad infinitum*). In other words: The so-called first-person perspective (or better the dyad of internal/external) is *uncircumventable*. It is an inherent structure of the world/experience. Since there is nothing outside of the world, one can only *be* (in) it, but not really 'looking at' it.

To sum it up: 1) Beyond my 'my world' is only 'more world'. 2) Trying to externalize oneself or the whole dyad of internal/external cannot be done without reintroducing the same structure and therefore the same problem at a higher level.

[M. 71]

14 September 2011

The second paragraph (“But there is ...”) and the summarization of my last letter, need revision because they are not quite what I wanted to say. The main point was that the error of those ‘sceptics’ lies in the assumption that there is a difference between the ‘real’ world and the ‘appearance’ of the world, i.e. *they fail to see the appearance as real*. When I say that the appearance is ‘real’, I mean that the appearance (including the most ‘private’ and ‘subjective’ states) is (already) *there in the world*. And therefore it is part of the structure or order of things in the world, which cannot be altered. In other words: The world as it is and the world as it appears are equal, i.e. there is no conflict between ‘*the*’ world and ‘*my*’ world, so to speak.

[N. 57]

19 September 2011

Let me start with your last couple of letters since the issues you raise in the one before might be answered too.

“All of the worst (i.e. most painful) sceptical scenarios require the *embeddedness* of one’s experience (or one’s self) in a higher-order ‘environment’ which is supposed to be *hidden* (i.e. not experienced). An example was the ‘brain in a vat’ scenario which I mentioned in my second-last letter. For me it was very important to realize that even in the worst case the ‘world’ would *contain both* ‘me’ *and* the ‘hidden’ higher-order environment, i.e. the ‘highest level’ is always the *world as a whole*. So whatever environment (‘hidden’ or not) is external to ‘me’, cannot be external to the world—nor can I (unless we use the term ‘world’ as counterpart of the I, which is not the case here). The world itself is of course neither ‘internal’ nor ‘external’, since it is the ‘over-all situation’.”

This was exactly my point. No matter how far you step back or how ‘high’ you go, you will always remain in the world as a whole, because that world in its entirety is nothing but the five holding-aggregates themselves. And yes, consequently, since you cannot get out of the five aggregates (you can only extinguish them), there is no external to the

world as a whole. External implies internal and *vice versa*, and both are to be distinguished within the world.

This is what more or less you continue to say in the respective letter and its amendment, and I can only agree with it (though of course there is always a chance of some misunderstanding still being there). As you already said, it is most crucial to realize that even one's most private thoughts and feelings *belong* to the world, not 'I'. Only in this way, one is able to abandon the self-view which so thoroughly pervades the whole structure of one's experience. When the 'I' is gone, the dyad of internal/external remains, but now 'internal' ceases to *signify* 'mine' or 'me' and 'external' ceases to point at 'others'. Both 'me' and 'others' were directly dependent upon the self-view which, now being gone, leaves no room for them to remain either.

I think this also answers the questions you raise in your earlier letter about the sense-bases. Consciousness is there with the eye and forms *in the world*, it is not 'in me', it is not *mine*. And yes, all of the senses are independent fields which operate regardless of each other. Mind is there to unite them and coordinate them. But it is important to remember that those forms you perceive, and those eyes you see in the mirror, or touch with your hand, are *already conscious before* you even appropriate them. That's what I mean when I often say "things appear as *already given* in your experience." Only with the appropriation, the division of eye and consciousness is created as something which is external and internal respectively.

[M. 72]

19 September 2011

Yes, what you say makes sense and seems to be in line with my current understanding.

I think what people usually mean when they talk about 'experience' or 'consciousness' is actually *contact* (between subject and object), or a *result* of that contact. I have a hard time to use these terms out of that context, since that doesn't make sense to me and appears contradictory. This might be one of the reasons for my confusion, because the *five aggregates* are much more fundamental than 'consciousness' or 'experience' in the

above mentioned sense, since *they must be there* for contact ('experience') to be possible. To refer to them in terms of 'experience' or 'consciousness' can be (and for me *is*) therefore very misleading. Perhaps you remember when I asked you in a previous letter: "But how can I say that my experience depends on sense organs if these very organs must themselves be perceived/imagined in the first place in order to exist?" I can see now the confusion in that question. What I called 'my experience' is *not* fundamental, since it means *contact*, but I *thought* it was the fundament (confusing it with the five aggregates), and *therefore* I could not see why or how there should be an even more fundamental level, i.e. a dependence on the senses. So for contact ('my experience') to be possible, *the dyad of body/environment must be already existent*. And it is *this very existence or presence or being-there* of that dyad which is 'consciousness' *as an aggregate*.

The five aggregates are not just what 'I see now', they also include what is absent, negative, peripheral, possible. That is another reason why the term 'experience' might be confusing, since it is usually associated only with the 'here and now'. I would prefer 'world' (as a whole). But there is no way *not* to confuse people, regardless of what words one uses.

Do you agree that the aggregate of consciousness does not 'emerge' as 'something' from the dyad of body/environment but is the very *presence* of it? That is how I see it.

[M. 73]

21 September 2011

Regarding my last letter, I have to correct myself again. What I *should* have said is: Most people, including me (in the past), regard the aggregate of consciousness as awareness or observation and that is the main reason why questions like "But how can I say that my experience depends on sense organs if these very organs must themselves be perceived/imagined in the first place in order to exist?" arise. I thought that I have to be *aware* of my sense organs in order for them to be present, i.e. I assumed that awareness = consciousness = presence/existence. That is also the reason why I could not understand Ven. Ñāṇavīra's statement that there is consciousness during sleep.

So when the Suttas speak of eye-consciousness depending on eye and forms, what do they actually mean by eye-consciousness? One's being in the world of forms by means of an eye (including deep sleep)? That is my current understanding.

Please forgive me that I bombard you with so many letters, but my understanding of consciousness has changed, which means that some things appear in a different light now. We defined consciousness as the *presence* of a thing. But somehow the meaning of the term 'presence' escaped me again and again, because whatever the thing is, falls under the category of name-and-matter alone. 'Isness' or 'presence' therefore appeared to me as an empty category, a nothing or blank without any specific meaning and certainly not what I would call 'consciousness'. So when I thought of 'consciousness' or 'presence', I could actually still think only of name-and-matter (regarding the meaning of those terms), since there was 'nothing else'. The result was that I used the term 'consciousness' or 'presence' as *just another word* for name-and-matter, since it appeared to have no characteristic of its own. But consciousness must possess such a characteristic, otherwise it would not be regarded as an additional aggregate or element. I think that I have now discovered what consciousness actually is. In my own experience I have noticed a factor which is necessary for phenomena to be phenomena, i.e. the very phenomenality of phenomena depends on it, i.e. without it there could be no *appearance* (of matter). And this factor I would describe as 'disclosure', 'unhiddenness', 'unconcealedness' or 'obviousness' of the phenomena. This itself is not a phenomenon, since it cannot be described in terms of *nāma* or *rūpa*. It is almost like a 'hole' or 'opening' 'through which' matter appears, thereby becoming a phenomenon. But the latter example with the 'hole' should not be taken too literally. *For me*, the terms 'presence' or 'existence' feel (!) more related to the 'end product' (*bhava?*), i.e. that which *depends* on the five aggregates (when they are not seen). When I 'saw' consciousness, it was a bit like a 'falling apart' of the world in its elements (like the separation of oil and water) and one of them was 'consciousness'.

Do you think that it can be justified to use terms like 'disclosure', 'unhiddenness', 'unconcealedness' to describe the aggregate of consciousness or do you think that I mix up the categories? Anyhow what I have described is a constitutive element of my experience, so the name might not matter very much.

[M. 75]

23 September 2011

From now on I will abstain from writing another letter before I have received an answer from you, but you should see my last three letters in the light of this one, because they ‘culminate’ in this one (for the time being) and that might influence your answer.

My current understanding is this: *Appearance (nāma) is the existence (viññāṇa) of substance (rūpa), i.e. the appearance indicates the elements which it depends on.*

This insight was actually a little ‘breath-taking’ and the implications of it are not yet fully clear to me. Nevertheless it is so much more than what I could see before. Despite my last letter, in which I ‘redefined’ *viññāṇa* from ‘presence’ or ‘existence’ into ‘disclosure’, I have to retract that statement (for now). Now I think that it is rather *nāma* which ‘discloses’ (indicates) *rūpa* and *viññāṇa*.

I will stop here, because I feel how the clarity begins to ‘vanish’ a bit and I don’t want to add (further) confusion.

[N. 58]

28 September 2011

Let me answer your letters in the order that you sent them:

I.

I agree with most of what is said in this letter, especially the following:

“I can see now the confusion in that question. What I called ‘my experience’ is *not* fundamental, since it means *contact*, but I *thought* it is the fundament (confusing it with the five aggregates) and *therefore* I could not see why or how there should be an even more fundamental level, i.e. a dependence on the senses. So for contact (‘my experience’) to be possible, *the dyad of body/environment must be already existent*. And it is *this very existence or presence or being-there* of that dyad which is ‘consciousness’ as *an aggregate*.”

The five aggregates are not just what ‘I see now’, they also include what is absent, negative, peripheral, possible. That is another reason why the term ‘experience’ might be confusing, since it is usually associated only with the ‘here and now’. I would prefer ‘world’ (as a whole). But there is no way *not* to confuse people, regardless of what words one uses.”

And your question “Do you agree that the aggregate of consciousness does not ‘emerge’ as ‘something’ from the dyad of body/environment but is the very *presence* of it?” already implies the correct answer. The idea of “emerging” (or flowing, or radiating, or any other attribute people ascribe to consciousness), comes as the result of regarding *contact* as the most fundamental aspect of the experience. As you already pointed out, the five aggregates are already there, they are *necessary* for contact to manifest. Not recognizing this priority of aggregates (not recognizing that they also “include what is absent, negative, peripheral, possible”) results in the appropriation of them, which leads to the manifestation of contact and the Self that is contacted.

II.

You asked: “So when the Suttas speak of eye-consciousness depending on eye and forms, what do they actually mean by eye-consciousness? One’s being in the world of forms by means of an eye (including deep sleep)?”

Yes, the Suttas speak of a *conscious eye* and the forms that arise in dependence on it. Neither of them is mine, neither of them am I, neither of them is my Self.

III. & IV.

You wrote: “So when I thought of ‘consciousness’ or ‘presence’, I could actually still think only of name-and-matter (regarding the meaning of those terms), since there was ‘nothing else’.” Exactly. Whatever you can think of, whatever you can feel, whatever you can experience, whatever you can *designate* (even with ambiguity), that will be *name-and-matter*.

You wrote: “I think that I have now discovered what consciousness actually *is*. In my own experience I have noticed a factor which is necessary for phenomena to be phenomena, i.e. the very phenomenality of phenomena depends on it, i.e. without it there could be no *appearance* (of matter)” but then later you added: “Despite my last letter in which I ‘redefined’ *viññāṇa* from ‘presence’ or ‘existence’ into ‘disclosure’, I have to retract that statement (for now). Now I think that it is rather *nāma* which ‘discloses’ (indicates) *rūpa* and *viññāṇa*.” I agree with the latter one. Yes, consciousness possesses certain characteristics, but that characteristic is not the phenomenality of phenomena (which is just a more general phenomenon). The characteristic that defines consciousness is simply whether it is eye-consciousness, ear-, nose-, tongue-, touch- or mind-consciousness. Although any of these particular types of consciousness have the nature of consciousness in general, nevertheless it is the arising of a particular dependence of conscious eye (ear, nose, etc.) and forms that gives rise to the corresponding experience of it. In other words, the *nature* of all of those different types of consciousness, despite its seemingly fundamental role, is actually *secondary* to (i.e. it depends on) those particular instances of consciousness. (And to no one’s surprise, this is exactly the opposite of what an ignorant mind is used to think, whereby the consciousness is the *center* of one’s experience and everything else revolves around it.) Thus, *viññāṇa* is on the ‘level’ of *rūpa*, so to speak, it is out there with the eye and forms, not *in here*, which is nothing but a way of relating to name-and-matter (internal, external and both).

And this brings me to your: “Appearance (*nāma*) is the existence (*viññāṇa*) of substance (*rūpa*), i.e. the appearance *indicates* the *elements* which it depends on.” I agree with the above statement only if you don’t take ‘existence’ in a pregnant sense of *bhava*. That’s why I prefer to use ‘presence’ and leave the ‘existence’ for *avijjā*. The understanding of the statement you made can indeed stop your breath for a moment, because by seeing that name-and-matter indicates nothing but that which it depends on, removes the Self out of the picture as a completely gratuitous and redundant phenomenon or, simply put—it empties you of yourself.

Let me know how this strikes you and don’t worry about bombarding me with letters. Write whenever you feel there is something important to say.

Thank-you for your letter, especially for allowing me to write to you whenever I feel there is something important to say. Sometimes I overestimate the importance of certain ‘insights’. After a while these ‘findings’ often appear to be of limited value or as no longer comprehensible. A lot of things in my former letters with all their amendments fall into that category. Nevertheless this seems to be part of the process of getting rid of wrong views, i.e. step by step.

After your last letter the topic of ‘consciousness’ or ‘presence’ seems to become clearer again. The only way to define presence is by means of that which is present. There is no presence of presence, no consciousness of consciousness, so the very attempt to define consciousness on its own is doomed to fail, because there is nothing, no essence or substance of consciousness which is consciousness and not name-and-matter.

You said: “the Suttas speak of a *conscious eye* and the forms that arise in dependence on it.” If my understanding is correct now, the senses are as ‘conscious’ as (for example) bricks in the wall (in that they are both present). The difference between the two is that one’s being in the world depends on the senses and not the bricks. As I already pointed out in an earlier letter, I mistook the conscious senses for something dependent on contact, so no wonder that I could not see how ‘my experience’ (or contact itself) should depend on them. I didn’t notice that consciousness is something very basic (on the ‘level’ of *rūpa* as you said) and therefore I had to choose between the devil and the deep blue sea: either the senses are *perceptions* or they are *present (!) independent of consciousness*. But since consciousness is *pre-phassa*, there is no such problem. Nevertheless I have to be careful not to think of these things in terms of *time*.

I have a question: Can we speak of the dyad of internal/external with regard to one sense alone? Hearing, for example, does not reveal the existence of a hearing *organ* ‘in here’. Nevertheless I would say intuitively that sounds would still appear as either ‘internal’ or ‘external’, but I might err.

[M. 77]

2 October 2011

You wrote: “the Suttas speak of a conscious eye and the forms that arise in dependence on it.” To which part of the trinity of eye/forms/eye-consciousness does ‘conscious eye’ refer? Eye or eye-consciousness?

A Sutta says: “In dependence on the eye and forms arises eye-consciousness.”⁴⁰ So how should this be ‘translated’?

[M. 78]

4 October 2011

What I wrote in my last letter, I think this is clear now. Eye and forms refer to *nāmarūpa*, internally and externally. Both arise and cease together, but the *forms arise in dependence on the eye*. Because of *that*, the respective consciousness is called eye-consciousness. *Both eye and forms* are that ‘something’ which consciousness is ‘of’. So eye-consciousness is consciousness *of* an eye and the forms that arise in dependence on it (as you already said).

In my second-last letter I wrote: “As I already pointed out in an earlier letter [...] there is no such problem.” This needs correction, because the senses are indeed perceived, otherwise they would not be conscious. I mistook consciousness for a mere ‘physical being there’ of the senses in the world, which is wrong, because consciousness depends on *nāmarūpa* (and *vice versa*). Therefore the senses and their corresponding ‘objects’, on which consciousness depends, must also be understood as *nāmarūpa* and not as *rūpa* alone.

[M. 79]

6 October 2011

Regarding the senses and consciousness: The more I think about the matter, the more it seems to me that (for the main part) the senses *must not* be regarded as *organs*.

I said in my last letter that eye-consciousness is consciousness *of* an eye and (of) the forms that arise in dependence on it. So the eye is regarded as an *organ*, i.e. as something ‘opaque’—a phenomenon ‘felt’ in the eye socket

or *seen* in the mirror or *touched* by the hands or even '*reflected*' by utterances of other people ("I like your green eyes" etc.).

While all of these descriptions of an eye describe the eye as 'something' in the (phenomenal) world, *none* of these 'eyes' is actually necessary in order for *seeing* to occur. I don't need to 'feel' something in my eye-socket etc. in order to *see*. So *all* of these eye-descriptions tell us *absolutely nothing* about the nature or dependent origination of seeing.

We defined consciousness as presence, which is always presence of something. I still agree. But as I see now, *presence just means that something is apparent*. And it is exactly *at this point* where the senses are needed! Not as 'something' which is *already apparent* (because that would not *make* things appear), but as *something which is required for 'presence/appearance' to be possible at all*.

When I look at my experience I find that things are present. And I agree that we can call this presence 'consciousness'. But there is *also* a factor in my experience on which this very presence or appearance of things *depends*. And this is the senses.

Nothing can *appear* or be *present* without the senses, so the senses themselves cannot be regarded as apparent or present, at least not in the 'opaque' sense of organs.

The senses which actually *make* things appear are not *organs* but '*openings*', '*holes*' or '*doors*'. The '*real*' senses are that '*through which*' things appear. I actually have to ask myself how it was possible to overlook this simple fact for so long, futilely trying to '*arrive*' at consciousness by staring at its content (including sense *organs*).

But the answer is actually quite easy: It is because of the '*transparent nature*' of the senses. One cannot see them, because one sees *through* them.

One has to become entirely subjective in order to understand that. In a sense one has to become 'childish'—the counterpart of the 'objective scientist' who 'sees through' so much, that 'seeing through' escapes him totally.

So for me there is now an alternative reading of the Suttas. For example: "In dependence on the eye and forms arises eye-consciousness." If I remain subjective, I cannot understand 'eye' as organ but as that '*opening through which* forms appear, i.e. become conscious. The same with the other senses. This is '*visible here and now*' and '*timeless*'—*contrary* to a

conscious eye *organ* which meets conscious forms, since seeing is *not always* accompanied by a phenomenal eye. Also the latter does not make understandable *how* they actually become conscious or present in the first place (namely by omitting the senses as door-like openings-*through*-which, replacing them with ‘opaque’ organs-*by*-which).

Also the Sabba Sutta appears differently, since ‘the All’ is now *complete* or in other words: *accessible*, because it *includes* now the *accesses* (*senses*) as *accesses* instead of as organs, or phenomena which are already accessed, leaving open the question *how* this comes about.

It can even be understood (better) why the Buddha speaks of each sense in the singular and not the plural, i.e. eye and not eyes, ear and not ears, etc., because as ‘transparent doors’ or ‘accesses’ they are not discernable as many by themselves. So however many eye *organs* I have, my field of vision will remain *one*. Also the superimposition of the senses is now understandable.

Including and interpreting the senses in that way, allows me to understand much better my experience as it is and to feel complete, so to speak.

[M. 80]

7 October 2011

I think that I can resolve the problem of the senses and consciousness. I had to remind myself that there are *negative* phenomena and that consciousness is also the presence of them, i.e. of the ‘absent’. The solution is as follows:

The *internal* senses, i.e. *nāmarūpa internally* must be regarded as ‘*negative*’ *phenomena*. The eye that I *see* in the mirror or *touch* with my hands is an *external* or ‘*positive*’ eye and *not* the *internal* eye that actually gives rise to forms externally (*rūpa* is of course the same in both internal and external appearances of one’s eye and therefore the dependence of ‘sight’ can also be grasped to a certain extent by studying one’s own eye externally). So the *internal* eye is a *negative phenomenon*, i.e. by appearing it appears not as something ‘opaque’ but as ‘opening’ which ‘discloses’ (does not hide) forms externally.

So it is not consciousness that discloses, nor is consciousness only the appearance or presence of the external forms through the eye (as I thought in my last letter). Instead consciousness is the presence of *both* the ‘negative’ senses (as ‘openings’) and the ‘positive’ environment (which appears through these ‘openings’).

Perhaps this is the first time that I actually understood, by *seeing* what a negative phenomenon is.

[N. 59]

25 October 2011

I’m glad to see that you were actually progressing through your letters even without me adding anything to it. This refers particularly to the letter you sent on the 6th October, to which I would have replied something very similar to what you wrote on the next day.

Yes, the senses are internal and external. And yes, people develop a gratuitous assumption which regards only the external eye (the observed, touched, examined) as the sense-organ, and modern science only adds to the confusion. Remember in the ‘Early Letters’, Ven. Ñāṇavīra had an insight where he realized that the senses can only appear reflexively or when accessed from a different sense (i.e. externally). He of course (at that point) didn’t take into account the *internal* side of senses, which is indeed the one that doesn’t appear (as a positive phenomenon), but it is nevertheless there. Thus the eye, because of which we can see, doesn’t appear at all as long as we take the fleshy eye to be an eye. However the reflexive image of an eye does appear, and it is this that (for a *puthujjana*, and for a *sekha* to some extent) is that which *is* the eye. And it is this reflexive eye that requires purification, so that internal eye can be seen for what it is. (What I mean will become clearer below—I added the last sentence of this paragraph after re-reading the whole email.)

You said: “So the *internal* eye is a *negative phenomenon*, i.e. by appearing it appears not as something ‘opaque’ but as an ‘opening’ which ‘discloses’ (does not hide) forms externally.” This is quite correct. Ven. Ñāṇavīra at one point referred to internal senses as “fields”—the negative fields through which phenomena appear. However the internal bases are not just static ‘fields’, sitting there waiting for the phenomena to come

through them. Those fields are determined by those very phenomena to *the extent* by which they are not those phenomena. Thus, although we can speak of the internal bases and develop a general idea of them, they are directly dependent upon the particular instances of phenomena arising. Does this make sense to you? What I'm trying to say is that the internal bases are *always* negative, and what you see in them is what you put in them and, as negative, they need to be positive in order to be. That's why the Buddha encourages the contemplation in which one eventually sees the internal bases as "hollow, empty, without the substance."⁴¹ Nevertheless the internal bases are still there in an *arahat* as *something* "hollow, empty, without the substance." The Buddha often compares the internal bases of a *sekha* to a bleeding wound, whereby the poisonous arrow has been removed, but he still has to take care of it, until the wound completely heals (cf. MN 105). In another Sutta in SN,⁴² the internal bases are compared to an empty village *assailed* by things. In the same manner, as long as one is not able to see the full extent of their negative nature, one will assail them with the assumptions and mis-perceptions, because of which the internal senses will *exist*, and *appear* (either reflexively as some view or another, or being confused with their external counterparts).

The most difficult negative sense to see is the mind itself, and that is because the positive aspects of mind (thoughts) are *negative* when compared to the other senses. So when one reflects on an eye, the reflexive image of that eye is a negative to the external eye organ, but this gets confused with the negative nature of the internal eye, thus the internal eye becomes that image of an eye which, in return, by being derived from the observed external eye, leads the *puthujjana* to a conclusion that this fleshy eye is all there is to an eye. For a *sekha* it is this reflexive image of an eye that requires dealing with (as I said above), and this is done by first acknowledging the reflexive validity of that image (i.e. seeing that at that moment, with the remnants of the ignorance present, that image of an eye is the internal eye), and secondly, repetitively regarding that image as *not-mine*, and hopefully removing all conceit in relation to it. It is only then that the internal eye has been completely freed and 'healed' from the parasitic impostor of one's reflexion. However, even then the reflexive image of an eye remains and continues

to appear whenever an *arahat* reflects on an eye, but it is not *assumed* to be an eye—the eye has ceased to exist. (Also, at that point the reflexive image loses its internal ‘feel’ to it and becomes closer in its nature to the external fleshy eye.)

“Instead consciousness is the presence of *both* the ‘negative’ senses (as ‘openings’) and the ‘positive’ environment (which appears through these ‘openings’).” I agree with this statement of yours, since we know that both negative and positive are that which is *nāmarūpa*, and consciousness is in relation to that. I would also add, in light of what I’ve said above, that if you describe the internal senses as “openings,” we could say that an ‘opening’ is as big as the phenomena that appear through it, not an inch more (figuratively speaking of course).

[M. 81]

10 November 2011

What you say makes sense to me. There is nothing in your letter which appears totally ‘out of reach’.

As you can see, I am quite late with my answer. The topic of the senses is still not clear to me. And I’m not sure where to start. Perhaps here:

In his Note on PHASSA (NoD), Ven. Ñāṇavīra says:

“If experience were confined to the use of a single eye, the eye and forms would not be distinguishable, they would not appear as separate things; there would be just the experience describable in terms of *pañc’upādānakkhandhā*. But normal experience is always multiple, and other faculties (touch and so on) are engaged at the same time, and the eye and forms as separate things are manifest to them (in the duality of experience already referred to).”

At the moment this appears wrong to me, even if I *don’t* regard the eye as an ‘opening’. The six senses give us only *external* things. This is the reason why each sense is mentioned with its external counterpart, i.e. eye and forms, ear and sounds, etc. If the senses themselves were just objects of the other senses (which is what the Ven. Ñāṇavīra seems to say), the dyad of internal/external would not exist, because the senses themselves would

belong to the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and ideas. For example: The eye which I see in the mirror is a form, the eye which I touch with my hand is a 'touch', the eye which I think of is an idea, etc. But no amount of looking at the eye in the mirror or touching or imagining it will give me the impression that the eye is something *internal*. The dyad of internal/external must be *already present in each of the six pairs* (eye-forms, ear-sounds etc.) *separately*, otherwise we would never get there.

I think the mistake is the assumption that the only way to gain access to the senses is *by means of the senses*. But the senses are the *senses* only in relation to something *external*. There certainly is an external access to the senses, e.g. when I look at my eyes in the mirror or touch them with my hands, but this is neither a necessary feature of the experience nor does it mean that this is the *only* way of experiencing them. On the contrary: The senses (at least 'my' senses) have an *internal dimension*, which is *independent* of the presence of external things. I can '*feel*' my hand *without* touching (or seeing) it. I also can feel my eyes and the other senses and my whole body *without* accessing them from the outside. This 'feeling' must not be confused with the sense of touch, since the latter requires an external counterpart (see 'The All' for example): I can *touch* a stone with my hand, but I *don't* need to *touch* my touching hand in order to 'feel' it.

I noticed this when I touched something without looking at my hands. The dyad was there in the sense of touch *alone*. No need to 'see' or 'imagine' a hand to make the dyad present. There was my hand, 'felt from within', and there was the object. Sometimes, after strangulation of an arm, the latter goes to sleep, which means that it is no longer present internally. With such a 'sleeping' arm we cannot touch things, because the (internal) arm is no longer there.

The same with the eyes, ears, etc. So even "if experience were confined to the use of a single eye," the eye and forms *would* be distinguishable, for the same reason that a single *hand* and tactile forms would be distinguishable. I cannot see forms with an eye that is not somehow connected to the 'blood stream' and the 'nervous system', i.e. I can see only with a *conscious* eye.

I think we can say that this internal dimension of the body is equal to 'being alive'. I am only in the world by means of such a 'conscious body'.

The meaning of the word ‘incarnation’ seems also closely related to this. I cannot be in the world without being in the ‘flesh’, which makes the ‘flesh’ ‘conscious’.

In my last letters I regarded the senses as ‘openings’, but at the moment I’m no longer sure of this, since I think that a (negative) ‘opening’ or ‘field’ can hardly be called ‘internal’ in relation to its (positive) content. Nevertheless these things still seem to be there. Perhaps they are the emptiness of the world of the senses as *subjects*. Sometimes it seems to me that the external forms, sounds, etc. meet internally. There is nothing ‘in here’, but nevertheless they meet ‘here’ and end ‘here’. The end of the external world is ‘here’. And the ‘internal’ body is like a ‘cloud’ or ‘shadow’ around that ‘center’.

I think this letter will also not be something final. Just another fragment. The picture never seems complete. Please let me know what you think, especially if you think that I’m wrong.

But something else has changed for the positive. While I’m still haunted by those ‘dark forces’, I seem to get some ‘help’ from ‘above’ also. But this is not intrusive. It’s also not a war against the ‘bad guys’. More like a connection of beings with similar intentions who help each other regardless of their actual realm.

[M. 82]

23 November 2011

My understanding has changed again: The senses (as “that in the world by which one is a perceiver and conceiver of the world”) are the *background on which* the world is given or present—similar to a movie screen which is the background of the movie. The relation of the senses and the world is therefore *asymmetrical*: The senses are *absent* in terms of the world, which is *present*. Both are superimposed upon each other. The world is as big as its background and *vice versa*. The senses—due to their negative nature as background on which the world is given—can *only appear in reflexion/reflection*.

I think you have already pointed out many of these things in your past letters (including your last one), but without a certain understanding of the senses and consciousness, I could not understand it properly. When I

regarded the senses as ‘openings’, this was still misleading, because an ‘opening’ is *immaterial*, but the senses are not. In other words: I could not bring together ‘opening’ and ‘organ’. Therefore ‘background’ seems to be a much more appropriate term, since an ‘organ’ *can* also be a ‘background’.

With this kind of understanding of the senses, I can understand consciousness or presence much better. Consciousness directly depends on the above-mentioned asymmetry of the senses and the world. *Without a background (senses) there is no presence.* A thing is *present* only insofar as it is given ‘to’ a sense as its background. Consciousness is the state of ‘occupation’ of the senses by the world. In a way the senses ‘*suffer*’ the world, they are ‘*burdened*’ by it. So consciousness depends on a *relation*, it depends on a *dyad*.

Maybe I misread the Ven. Ñāṇavīra, but as far as I can see he never pointed this out clearly (if at all). For him the senses seem to be *not* ‘*receptors*’ but *phenomena amongst other phenomena*. At least his *Notes* (for example on *phassa* and *viññāṇa*) seem to indicate this (*contrary* to some of his early letters!). I also was of this opinion but many (if not most) of my letters to you clearly show how many problems arise from such a view (at least for me).

It is quite clear to me now that the term ‘presence’ can only be understood in relation to the dyad of the senses and the world, *but not as if seen from the outside*, as the Ven. Ñāṇavīra seems to think. The world is the world of the senses, it is *their* world. And *therefore* consciousness depends on this dyad of senses and sense objects. So when the Suttas say that eye-consciousness arises in dependence on the eye and forms, this *must not* be confused with other Suttas which speak of a conscious body and name-and-matter externally. The latter dyad is only a product of the former triad. This is how I see it.

So eye-consciousness is more or less the consciousness *which the eye has of the forms*. The wording might not be very accurate or appropriate, but I want to express the idea that the eye is a *receiver*, a *receptor* and that it responds in its own way to external stimulation. ‘To’ a receptor only something *resistant* can be present. So there is no presence, no consciousness without resistance, without a ‘coming together’ of two.

There is no presence unrelated to a receptor. Our whole world comes into being in that way.

I don't want to say that there is a world of phenomena or pseudo-phenomena independent of consciousness. I want to say that there is an *underlying structure* of the experience which can be discovered indirectly when experience is properly described.

Please let me know what you think (also if you think that I misunderstood Ven. Ñāṇavīra).

[N. 60]

30 November 2011

Thank-you for your letters. I was just about to post the replies to your previous letters, before your last arrived. I will look into it later, for now here are my thoughts on the issues you raised earlier on (which also might answer some of your new questions). I've replied to both of the letters, so that it will be easier for you to see what I thought on your first one, before your views were 'updated'. I might have been a bit blunt, but that was only so as to prevent any possible confusion from arising. Let me begin.

I.

You say: "if the senses themselves were just the objects of the other senses, the dyad internal/external would not exist." I think that you've misunderstood this. The senses themselves do belong to the forms, sounds, etc. They are 'matter' after all, but they are 'matter' *because of which* one can perceive and conceive the world. And this distinction is only possible to make because one's experience is not made of one sense only. When internal and external senses are seen as just matter, what disappears is not the dyad internal/external, it is the appropriation of that dyad in itself—what disappears is the notion of 'internal=mine/me'.

You also said: "the six senses give us only *external* things." This is exactly what Ven. Ñāṇavīra says, in the passage you quoted above. If the experience would consist of a single eye only, everything would appear external to it, and the eye would not be able to see itself. But it is because

of the other senses that the internal dimension becomes discerned (and for a *puthujjana*—appropriated), and you seem to confirm this later in your letter when you say “the senses (*at least ‘my’ senses*) have an internal dimension” (*italics are mine*). You seem to have a notion of a close connection between ‘internal’ and ‘mine’, but since ‘mine’ still has the greater priority in your experience, you seem to think that ‘internal’ cannot exist without it. You continued “...which is *independent* of the presence of external things.” The only thing that (appears to be) independent of the external things is the Self, not the internal sense bases (hence their name is relational—internal/external). This is why the task of a *sekha* is to ‘heal’ the internal senses from the “poisonous dart” which has been extracted, until the internal is seen for what it is— hollow and empty.

You wrote: “I think the mistake is the assumption that the only way to gain access to the senses is *by means of the senses*. But the senses are the *senses* only in relation to something *external*.” After the discussion above, it should be clear now that it is possible to know this only because of the existence of the other senses, different from the sense you are examining.

You wrote: “I can ‘*feel*’ my hand *without* touching (or seeing) it...” You can’t, because to feel means to feel pleasure, pain or neutral feeling. When you say that you feel your hand, what you actually mean is to *perceive* it, whether through the sense of touch, or through your mind, but either way, you seem to confuse here ‘perception’ and ‘feeling’. This is actually quite a common and easily made error, due to our Western conditioning (science, common wisdom) and I encounter it in a lot of people.

The rest of the points in your letter should become clearer now, when you re-read them in the light of what I said above. Let me just add that, for example, when you said “if experience were confined to the use of a single eye, the eye and forms *would* be distinguishable, for the same reason that a single *hand* and tactile forms would be distinguishable.” For you, this view persists only because the priority of your experience still lies on ‘mine’ (i.e. internal), and as a result of that ‘internal’ is being ‘found’ (or added reflexively) there where it isn’t , and when the internal is being attended to, it is always *more* than just ‘hollow and empty’.

II.

I seem to agree with the opening paragraph of your second letter, though I cannot vouch that I exactly understood what you meant (especially when you were talking about the ‘asymmetrical’—could you say something more about it, just so that I can see that I got it right).

I don’t recall Ven. Ñāṇavīra saying that sense organs (in the context we are discussing) are just a phenomenon amongst other phenomena. I checked the Note of PHASSA and VIÑÑĀṆA, and it seems to support what we’ve been discussing, especially what I said in the letter no. 1 above. In his Note on PHASSA, Ven. Ñāṇavīra is trying to explain that the difference of the sense organs of a *puthujjana* and *arahat* is not material, it is subjective. For a *puthujjana* his eye-organ is *his*, it is ‘mine’, ‘me’, while for the *arahat* this subjectivity has ceased (and he sees the eye-organ for what it is). Thus, for a *puthujjana*, the internal has been appropriated, while in an *arahat* it has been ‘pushed out’ so to speak, seen as empty and impermanent, not regarded as ‘mine’. Bearing this in mind, you can see that in his Note on *viññāṇa*, Ven. Ñāṇavīra tried to show how it is that a *puthujjana* regards his sense organs as his. Due to the nature of *viññāṇa*, a *puthujjana* tends to regard it as subjective, thus superimposing it over other aspects of his experience which share the same tendencies towards subjectivity, such as the sense-organs (they too don’t *appear* in relation to what is present). Thus a *puthujjana* comes to think that his senses, his body is his consciousness, and that’s why scientists are still trying to find consciousness in the human body (as a gland or a particular part of our brain). While the Note on PHASSA approaches the problem through the six-senses, the Note on VIÑÑĀṆA focuses on the approach through the dependence of *nāmarūpa-viññāṇa*. Not understanding the superimposition of the two, a *puthujjana* confuses them both, as a result of which he *exists*.

You wrote: “It is quite clear to me now that the term ‘presence’ can only be understood in relation to the dyad of the senses and the world, *but not as if seen from the outside*, as the Ven. Ñāṇavīra seems to think.” Can you give me a reference to this thought of Ven. Ñāṇavīra? I’m not sure I’m getting the context right.

“So when the Suttas say that eye-consciousness arises in dependence of the eye and forms this *must not* be confused with other Suttas which speak of a conscious body and name-and-matter externally. The latter dyad is

only a product of the former triad.” The latter dyad is a product of the former one inasmuch as the latter dyad represents an *arahat*, and the former one a *puthujjana* (or a *sekha* to a degree). I agree with you: the world is the world of the senses, it is their world (that’s what I mean when I say that your intentions, feelings and so on belong to *things*, not you). However we must clarify here about when you say “*therefore* consciousness depends on this dyad of senses and sense objects.” This refers to a *puthujjana*, one for whom the sense of ‘I’ is still present. For him it is *his* senses that see, hear, etc. and that’s how ‘contact’ arises, as Ven. Ñāṇavīra pointed out in PHASSA.

You said: “So eye-consciousness is more or less the consciousness *which the eye has of the forms*.” So it should be clear now that my answer to this is No, because here you are confusing those two consciousnesses: the eye-consciousness of a *puthujjana* (the appropriated, subjective consciousness) and a consciousness (or that which we would refer to as consciousness) of an *arahat*. It is here, in your sentence above, that you seem to confuse exactly that which you said shouldn’t be confused: the triad of *eye-consciousness, eye and forms* with the *conscious body and nāmarūpa externally* (i.e. an organ which is just a receiver or a receptor as you say, to the external stimulation). If you remove the confusion of the *puthujjana*’s consciousness with the *arahat*’s one, then: “there is no presence, no consciousness without resistance, without a ‘coming together’ of—two. There is no presence unrelated to a receptor. Our whole world comes into being in that way” is quite correct.

[M. 83]

30 November 2011

You wrote: “The senses themselves do belong to the forms, sounds, etc. they are ‘matter’ after all, but they are ‘matter’ *because of which* one can perceive and conceive the world.” I think it is important that you mentioned this. The Suttas (for example the Sabba Sutta) *distinguish* between

eye and forms,
ear and sounds,
nose and smells,

tongue and tastes,
body and touches,
mind and things.

So I think that (unfortunately) there is room for interpretation. To me it is *not clear* from those Suttas that eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind are *themselves* forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and things. In my letter, to which you replied first, I regarded eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind as *internal* and forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, things as *external* or *environmental*. And it was because of this kind of understanding that I could say: “If the senses themselves were just objects [read: *environment*] of the other senses [...], the dyad of internal/external would not exist,” i.e. in that case all things would be environmental, which is (of course) nonsense. Since I regarded forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and things as *environmental*, I had to attribute *any ‘perception below the skin’* to the internal senses, i.e. to the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Because of this I could say: “I could ‘*feel*’ my hand *without* touching it.”

You replied: “You can’t, because to feel means to feel pleasure, pain or neutral feeling. When you say that you feel your hand, what you actually mean is to perceive it, whether through the sense of touch, or through your mind, but either way, you seem to confuse here ‘perception’ and ‘feeling’. This is actually quite a common and easily made error, due to our Western conditioning (science, common wisdom) and I encounter it a lot in people.” While I understand what you mean (and also agree with it), it should be clear now that I didn’t make that mistake (at least not with regard to this topic), since I meant ‘internal perception’ with ‘feel’, which is the reason why I used quotation marks.

To repeat myself: I attributed any perception ‘below the skin’ to eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, which I regarded as internal, and any other perception to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, things, which I regarded as external.

So when I spoke of the ‘internal dimension’ of the senses or body, I meant the way of perceiving them. For example: I perceive my body as ‘warm’, and therefore I attributed this internal ‘warmth’ to the senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind) and *not* to the ‘touches-section’ of their external counterpart forms, sounds, smells, tastes, *touches*, things.

This was the basis of my letter, to which you replied first in yours. While this kind of understanding might be wrong, I tried to point it out clearly now in order to avoid misunderstandings.

So what is ‘the All’:

eye and forms,
ear and sounds,
nose and smells,
tongue and tastes,
body and touches,
mind and things.

1) Six *openings* and what appears *through* them?

2) Six *sense-organs* and what appears *to* them?

3) The (sixfold) *body* as it is *perceived internally* and its environment?

Those three possibilities I mentioned in my letters to you so far.

But if I understand you correctly, the difference between this dyad of senses and phenomena is not in *appearance* but in ‘*function*’, which is the reason for their discrimination. Is that correct?

Regarding your answer: “I seem to agree with the opening paragraph of your second letter, though I cannot vouch that I exactly understood what you meant (especially when you were talking about the ‘asymmetrical’—could you say something more about it, just so that I can see that I got it right).” With ‘asymmetrical’ I meant the ‘arrangement’ of the senses and their corresponding objects: By being internal, they are negative, while their objects are positive, i.e. the relation of eye and forms is not that of two positives (which I would call ‘symmetrical’).

“Can you give me a reference to this thought of Ven. Ñāṇavīra? I’m not sure I’m getting the context right.” As far as I can see, for the Ven. Ñāṇavīra (Note on PHASSA, for example) eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind *belong* to the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and things, which I regard(ed) as *external/objective*. Therefore I said that he seems to think of them ‘as if seen from the outside’. I think this is the same problem which I addressed at the beginning of this letter. These things might be misunderstandings due to different understandings, so to speak.

I need to ponder on some things you wrote in your letter before I can address them, but please don’t hesitate to answer me at any time you want.

I am no longer sure about my last letter. As soon as the senses become the 'background on which' or 'openings through which', they are the subject or subjective. Maybe the thinking in terms of negatives and absents can be overdone? A hole in a wall for example: What we actually *see* is not a *negative*, i.e. a hole, but *two positives* which are superimposed upon each other in a certain way, namely a *wall* which is 'interrupted' by *things* behind.

Maybe such superimposition of positives is the way how negatives come about generally? But what then is a positive? How can something be a positive? I cannot think of something positive without 'backgrounds' and 'openings'. They seem to belong together, but those 'negatives' seem to be like a mirage, since as soon as one recognizes them, they turn into something positive (however faint).

My idea was that the very structure which underlies suffering requires the senses, i.e. the senses must be inherent to this structure. To 'suffer' something means to 'passively receive' it, to be at the mercy of it. Craving must, of course, also be there, but this is not what I mean here with 'structural'. The world appears as a weight to me, as a burden, as oppressive and, albeit I cannot find the subject, it is nevertheless necessary for a weight or burden to be there. The world (of forms, sounds, etc.) cannot burden itself. And at this point the senses become recognizable, even if they don't appear as positives. It is the burden, the being unasked-for of things which indicates them, which indicates a receiver or subject. At least that was my line of thought. But I am not sure whether this kind of thinking must be *cultivated* or *abandoned*. Can you help here?

[M. 85]

7 December 2011

In your last letter you said: “The only thing that (appears to be) independent of the external things is the Self, not the internal sense bases (hence their name is relational—internal/external).” But you also said: “If the experience would consist of a single eye only, everything would appear external to it, and the eye would not be able to see itself.” *Either* these two of your sentences are contradictory or my understanding of internal/external is faulty. Because if internal/external are *relational*, how would things appear *external* to an eye which itself is *not* apparent?

When the Ven. Ñāṇavīra says: “If experience were confined to the use of a single eye, the eye and forms would not be distinguishable, they would not appear as separate things [...]”⁴³ he *either* tries to describe something which cannot be described or my understanding is wrong again. If the eye does not appear and if no other sense-faculties are involved, the situation cannot be described in terms of ‘a single eye’ or ‘eye and forms’. If the distinction of eye and forms is not possible *in the first place*, we cannot speak of them as two indistinguishable things. He describes the situation *as if seen from the outside, but at the same time asserts that such an outside point of view is not possible in that situation*. It is like saying: “A single-eye-experience is a no-eye-experience” or “1 = 0.”

[N. 61]

16 December 2011

Rather than covering paragraph by paragraph, I think that I can pin-point the main thing that you are missing in my letters: there is *no internal* for an *arahat*. Now that I have said it bluntly, let me qualify this statement.

An *arahat*’s experience can be described, as both of us know, as conscious body and name-and-matter externally. We also know that name-and-matter is said to be ‘All’ thus, whatever an *arahat* experiences, ‘all of it’ is—consequently—external. A conscious body remains there standing in the world as something because of which there is the experience. You cannot experience ‘internal’ because, when you do, it is ‘external’. Or rather you can experience it, but that is possible only when *avijjā* is there. That’s why a *puthujjana* has to ‘heal’ his wounds (i.e.

internal), when they are healed there is nothing to be felt *left there*, and that which used to be (thought of as) internal is now a subtler external (to put it crudely); and that which is now internal is not ‘internal’ in the *puthujjana*’s sense of the word, it is simply a negative aspect of the present experience of a conscious body towards which you can only *relate* externally, that is when you *intend* to. Does this make sense? You cannot, as an *arahat*, experience the conscious body, or to put it differently: you can, but either ‘passively’, as a negative, as something out there that you *know is the reason* because of which this experience is here; or as an external object, towards which you have just directed your attention. (Here I can call to mind the discussion we had in the past about ‘matter’ and how it is impossible to directly reach it—it is always ‘below your feet’.)

[M. 86]

23 December 2011

Unfortunately I cannot grasp the (full) meaning of what you said in your last letter. It appears to me that you say that there can be external without internal but, since internal and external are relational, this cannot be (?). You wrote: “Here I can call to mind the discussion we had in the past about ‘matter’ and how it is impossible to directly reach it—it is always ‘below your feet’.” This seems to be very important but at the moment I cannot make much use of it. Perhaps this has something to do with my health. I have a decayed tooth which gives me a lot of trouble. The dentist said it should be extracted. But my fear and anxiety are too strong to undergo this procedure. I don’t fear the pain as pain, I fear *death*. So I try to heal it by alternative means. But anyway ... I think this clearly shows that I’m hit by two arrows.

I can see *how* pitiful all this is. I also had/have some heart problems, which gave me an ‘extra boost’ towards the precepts and sense restraint. The price of indulgence in sensuality is too high. It’s literally death. Even the tiniest bit of enjoyment is a danger, since it depends on this body, which cannot be relied upon, it depends on ‘being alive’, which is not sure.

In the past I have made a ‘deal’ with my body not to leave me before I have achieved what I want to achieve but, as I see now, this can only apply

(if at all) when the effort is relentless. There is only enough time when the time is filled with the effort. Watching TV, playing computer games, listening to music—I see the harm in it. And I also see that seeing the harm in these things is not compatible with the way of the world.

Especially in the recent past I dreamed of myself in robes again. I felt the freedom of it. I really want to be a monk. But I think this is not possible as long as I am bound to so much fear and anxiety. There would be too much worry about food and health and such things (my bodily constitution is not very good). I don't want *additional* trouble for me and others. I also feel that I need to be alone in order to solve this problem. I don't like the physical presence of other people. I don't like to use my mouth for talking. So a *monastery* might actually be worse than my current place. Why live together with others? I don't want that. To meet/talk once in a while should be more than enough for me. Travelling is also out of question at the moment.

I hope I don't trouble you with this kind of letter. I'm 31 years old now. I don't know how much time is left for me. I (don't) know it in a way that is shocking. So it's time to do the practice more vigorously. I think I am too much of a 'philosopher'. But now I see even harm in this kind of excessive thinking. Much more important, at least now, is the restraint and the meditation.

Perhaps I will be able to understand better what you have written when I am more calm, which is not the case at the moment. *Ānāpānasati* does help me to cope with the pain, especially at night. At some point the pain subsides, provided I persist.

- 33. SN 35:23 (Tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, CDB, p. 1140.)
- 34. MN 109.
- 35. <http://skeptikos.blogspot.com/2006/12/ontology.html>
- 36. SN 35:23. (See M.56, p. xx.)
- 37. One of the six heretical teachers contemporaneous with the Buddha. He held 1) that there is no cause, either ultimate or remote, for the depravity of beings or for their rectitude; 2) the attainment of any given condition or character does not depend either on one's own acts, nor on the acts of another, nor on human effort; 3) there is no such thing as power or energy or human strength or human vigour.
- 38. MN 28.
- 39. "In philosophy, the brain in a vat is an element used in a variety of thought experiments intended to draw out certain features of our ideas of knowledge, reality, truth, mind, and meaning. It is based on an idea, common to many science fiction stories, that a mad scientist, machine, or other entity might remove a person's brain from the body, suspend it in a vat of life-sustaining liquid, and connect its neurons by wires to a supercomputer which would provide it with electrical impulses identical to those the brain normally receives. According to such stories, the computer would then be simulating reality (including appropriate responses to the brain's own output) and the person with the "disembodied" brain would continue to have perfectly normal conscious experiences without these being related to objects or events in the real world." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brain_in_a_vat)
- 40. SN 35:93.
- 41. SN 22:95.
- 42. SN 35:191.
- 43. NoD, PHASSA (c).

2012

[M. 87]

3 January 2012

I'm not sure whether I should apologize for my last letter. At the moment fear and anxiety are bearable. I am more inclined than ever to put an end to this suffering and live accordingly.

Regarding internal/external and the senses: Phenomena appear to me as being 'passively received' and 'suffered', i.e. something of alien/external origin. They are like an 'unnecessary *addition*', something which could also be *absent*. So phenomena (by being *phenomena*) somehow indicate the (internal) senses, even if the latter do not directly appear. The nature of phenomena requires the senses to be there. But we can relate to them *only via the phenomena*, i.e. *indirectly*. Either *internally* as 'something *empty*' or as this or that *external* phenomenon.

This is how I understand your last letter. So, as far as I can see, the dyad of internal/external is still there in the *arahat*, but the internal is 'emptied' of any phenomenal content. It is just indicated by the external phenomena.

Regarding my practice: When I feel so very bad I often have the wish or even urge to pray. Should I abandon this? I have the feeling that there are beings who listen and try to help. But I don't want to depend on external circumstances and relations too much. So what I actually did most of the time was the recollection of the Buddha by reciting the text (but in German) silently. In the past I did not allow myself to do such practices. But this has become different.

[N. 62]

3 January 2012

Regarding praying: as you seem to realize yourself there is a difference between praying to the external ‘sources’ (whatever they may be) and wishing for things to happen (miracle cures, magical vanishing of the problems, etc.), and reciting and recollecting the Buddha’s words and teachings. The latter form of praying is not really ‘praying’ as such, as long as one doesn’t start using it for the magical purposes I mentioned above. When one recites the teachings, even if there is not enough strength to investigate the meanings, at least one is making some form of an effort whereby the mind, by being unable to settle itself internally, is at least not refusing to give in and maintains the external connection (however shallow and temporary) with the Dhamma. It’s a resort everyone at some point has to turn to but, even as such, it is still capable of establishing one’s mindfulness and enabling one to go through all sorts of difficult experiences. Paired with the practice of wisdom and concentration it can leave no room for Māra to establish himself (since all internal and external aspects of one’s experience are being covered). Just thinking about the Buddha and the Dhamma can inspire the mind and lift it out of the pit where it sometimes inevitably falls.

[N. 63]

7 January 2012

You said on the 23rd of December: “Even the tiniest bit of enjoyment is a danger, since it depends on this body, which cannot be relied upon, it depends on ‘being alive’, which is not sure.”

Although this is true, it has to be carefully distinguished and noted that it is the *delight* in sensual enjoyment that causes suffering. Obviously it is impossible to engage in sensuality without delighting in it, but what I’m trying to say is that the pleasant feelings that arise in your daily life without you actively seeking them (there are bound to be some) are to be understood for what they are—and even more importantly—the way they are. This means that they have to be allowed to arise and the tendency to *deny* them has to be restrained. So, if a sense of pleasure arises, there is

nothing to fear if you are not making an active effort towards that pleasure. See it and see its impermanence.

Regarding your dream about being a monk: as you seem to already realize, if the current conditions are supportive for your practice of the Dhamma (or if they are not too obstructive), don't feel the pressure to ordain. Being a monk simply means putting yourself in a place which is more conducive for practice (less distractions, less engagements, more rules, etc.), and although this would work for most of the people, still it does not apply to everyone. There are lots of duties, expectations and involvements in the monasteries, and for some people that can make things harder than keeping the eight precepts at home. And that is the whole point: if you can keep the eight precepts in the place where you are, then there is no reason to change it. If, let's say in the future, you think that you would also be able to keep the precepts and practise in the monastery like you do at home, then by all means go to the monastery, because the basis is met and the monastery would only boost your striving.

Practise and philosophise, do whatever you can to understand your own suffering.

[M. 88]

13 January 2012

I agree with your advice regarding becoming a monk. I also agree that it's not the pleasant feeling itself which has to be avoided but the delight in it (or the resistance against it). Perhaps I tend to be a bit extreme in my formulations and resolutions sometimes.

As far as I can see I have to go my own way. I suffered (and still suffer) immensely in my efforts to understand certain things. But trying to parrot the wisdom of others did not help me in the end. For example, I just cannot agree with some things Ven. Ñāṇavīra has said. And I don't see how asking for the 1000th time for clarification will help. And I am not willing to blame myself when I, after thorough examination and consideration, come to the conclusion that he (or anyone else) has made a mistake or is not consistent.

Unfortunately the Suttas leave room for different interpretations, but in the end it seems to be better to directly rely on them and one's own wisdom instead of adopting too soon a certain interpretation of Ven. X or writer Y.

[M. 89]

19 January 2012

Can you help me to understand MN 28? What I mean is especially this passage (which is repeated with regard to all the six senses):

“If, friends, internally the eye is intact but no external forms come into its range, and there is no corresponding conscious engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness. If internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range, but there is no corresponding conscious engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness. But when internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range and there is the corresponding conscious engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding section of consciousness.

“The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging. The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be are included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: ‘This, indeed, is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: “One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination.” And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origin of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of

desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering.’ At that point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.”⁴⁴

No matter how I look at it, I cannot make sense of it.

1) “If internally the eye is intact”—In my visual field, forms certainly point ‘inwards’, but there is no internal eye, i.e. nothing or *no thing* to which the terms ‘internal’ and—‘intact’ can apply, so what does that phrase mean? Ven. Ñāṇavīra seems to think that it means the eye as it appears within other sense-fields, for example the tactile field, *but such an eye would be external*. Apart from that, the text alone does *not* tell this.

2) “Corresponding engagement”—What does that mean? Usually it is either said to mean either *attention* or *contact* (in the sense of *phassa*). Neither makes sense to me. Elsewhere it is said that contact is the coming together of *three*, namely eye, forms, eye-consciousness but here (MN 28) the “corresponding engagement” is mentioned before consciousness has occurred. The same applies if we say that it means attention: How can there be attention *before* consciousness? Doesn’t make sense at all.

3) “Corresponding section of consciousness”—Does this mean *seeing* (presence of visual phenomena/forms)? The text speaks of forms *before* consciousness has arisen and of (eye and) forms being there even if *no* consciousness arises for example: “If internally the eye is intact and externally forms come into range, but there is no corresponding engagement, then there is no appearing of the corresponding type of consciousness.”

But how can there be forms (visual phenomena) without seeing? But in case that ‘corresponding type of consciousness’ does *not* mean ‘seeing’, what else does it mean?

4) The “corresponding type of consciousness” which is said to appear in dependence on intact internal eye, external forms which have come into range and “corresponding engagement”—is this consciousness the same as the *holding-aggregate of consciousness* which is said to have “thus come into being”?

5) Why does the text tell us that the *five-holding-aggregates* come into being in that way? In other words: How is eye + forms + ‘corresponding

engagement' + 'corresponding type of consciousness' *sufficient for holding to occur instead of just the five aggregates*? I would conclude from this that the whole Sutta does not apply to an arahat.

All the terms which are used, like 'eye', 'forms', 'engagement', 'consciousness' have a certain meaning to the reader but, if the meaning is applied to the text, it becomes an absolute mess. I conclude from this that any of those terms must have a meaning which is *far from being obvious*.

I could not find help from the internet. It seems that most readers are blind to certain subtleties and implications. Are you able to make sense of this Sutta? Can you share your understanding with me?

[N. 64]

8 February 2012

Yes, MN 28 is a very important Sutta, which is why it is very difficult to understand. Let me cover your letter point by point:

1) You said "Ven. Ñāṇavīra seems to think that it means the eye as it appears within other sense-fields, for example the tactile field, *but such an eye would be external*." And yes, such an eye is indeed external—when viewed by other senses. That is the whole point I was trying to make in the internal/external discussion we had before. In vision, the internal eye *doesn't* appear, you can only access it *externally* through the other senses. The thing is that one *knows*, one *understands* that it is because of that eye that the vision is there. One also *knows* that you cannot possibly access that internal eye directly, since all you will get is that which you see through it, or the external fleshy object, if you try to approach it with the other senses. It might help if you try and think of the six sense experience as *manifold*, and by that I mean that each sense has its own domain, and these domains don't mix or encroach on each other (the five senses meet in the mind, which is why they are the mind's domain, so to speak). Thus, in the domain of *vision*, the eye will never be seen but, because the mind and its domain are present there simultaneously, you *know* that that which is 'eye' is there, even if you don't *see it*, hence the 'internal eye'. Think of 'internal' as an external object experienced *directly* 'because of which' you are experiencing the external objects in the first place. Or think of 'internal' as something which is not actually internal, in a sense

that it is ‘inside’ of you, it is more of an external, but an external which is *less external* than the external object in the world.

2) “Corresponding engagement” is a very loose translation of the Pāli term used in this instance. Literally it should be something like “basis for...” or “nutriment for...,” which simply means that when the relevant factors are present, *phassa* will occur (i.e. the Self will be contacted). “Basis for...” indeed precedes the actual arising of contact, but it’s not essentially different from it. Think of it as *underlying tendencies* stemming from *avijjā*, which result in *one* being contacted. Thus the passage can read: when the eye organ is intact, and *it* sees the forms, with the underlying tendencies present (e.g. particular type of intention or interest and desire that that eye might have), the corresponding type of consciousness is manifested. The crucial thing here is to note that the *intentionality of sight* belongs to the eye (or ear, nose, etc.) *not* to one’s Self (the eye sees, the nose smells, etc.). When I say “intentionality,” I mean *saṅkhāra* not *cetanā* (which is possible only because *saṅkhāra* is already given beforehand). It is just in this way that in *paṭiccasamuppāda*, *saṅkhāra* precedes consciousness (when the way of suffering is laid down). And when I say “belongs to the eye” I mean it is directly determined by it—i.e. it could not possibly appear without an eye for its basis. Do you see what I mean? This Sutta is trying to tell one that an intention for the pleasant sights for example, directly depends upon a visual organ in your body, which is clearly out of control (consciousness cannot possibly change this fact), thus whatever you desire, do, strive for, based on that sight, will also fundamentally be out of your control, or simply—it is impermanent.

Looking at it like this also allows the functioning of the aggregates in an *arahat*’s case, when the underlying tendencies are completely uprooted: the eye sees forms, the intention is there, and the consciousness gets manifested, until of course, the five aggregates fall apart. (This should also answer your points no. 4 and 5.)

So, you were right this Sutta doesn’t apply to an *arahat*, since it deals with the “basis for...” the Self to arise.

I looked into MN 28 again and as far as I can see, the meaning of internal/external in that Sutta is *different* from the internal/external that we discussed. In our correspondence ‘external’ stands for ‘objective’ or ‘phenomenal’, so *no wonder* that *nothing is left to really be internal*.

But MN 28 tells us that the ‘four great elements’ can be internal and external, for example:

“What, friends, is the earth element? The earth element may be either internal or external. What is the internal earth element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and clung-to; that is, head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and clung-to: this is called the internal earth element.”⁴⁵

All these organs are called internal, *despite the fact that one has to look at them with the eye or mind in order to discern and access them*. So it is quite clear that the meaning of ‘internal’ is limited to ‘one’s own body’ and to nothing else. The internal senses are not *more* internal than liver, heart, lungs and bones, i.e. they are internal because they belong to one’s own body and *not* because of their inability to perceive themselves.

I bet the Suttas don’t care how I access my bones, when they call them internal. And in the same way it doesn’t matter how I access my eye: it is internal because it belongs to this body and *not* because it cannot see itself.

An *external* eye, according to MN 28, would therefore be an eye with no connection to this body (and mind). But my eye, as I see it in the mirror or touch it with my hands, is an *internal* eye according to MN 28, because it belongs to ‘this body’ like the kidneys.

This meaning of internal/external is quite different from that of our previous discussions. This, of course, does not mean that your arguments are wrong. On the contrary. But I applied a meaning to these terms which (I think) cannot be found in the Suttas and therefore you could only point

out the consequences of this ‘mistake’, namely that a ‘true internal’ cannot be found.

As far as I can see, the Suttas depend on the ‘assumption’ that we can trust our experience, which means that consciousness is *disclosure* of an independent reality ‘below its feet’. Whatever I perceive is not in me nor is it created by me. I, as my senses, can only *disclose what is already there* (dependent, of course, on the ‘capacity’ of my senses, which is certainly equal to *their* ‘interest’). ‘To be’ is ‘to disclose’. Otherwise things would be mine or belong to me. ‘Disclosure’ is the only ‘way’ *not* to be in control of things. That is the reason why MN 28 can speak of forms even before they come into range of the eye, i.e. before seeing actually occurs. The whole thing is ‘outside’, not just its ‘primary qualities’. Even such things as ‘beauty’ are ‘in the world’ and not ‘in the eye’ or ‘in me’. It seems to me that *not* to allow things to exist independently is an indicator of self-view (like “Because I see, forms exist (or at least colours),” but when asked how he ‘colours’ forms, there will be no answer, because he can’t).

So because of the senses there is disclosure of the world (in which the senses can be found too).

This is my understanding so far. And as far as I can see, it is close to your: “Think of ‘internal’ as an external object experienced *directly* ‘because of which’ you are experiencing the external objects in the first place. Or, think of ‘internal’ as something which is not actually internal, in a sense that it is ‘inside’ of you, it is more of an external, but an external which is *less external* than the external object in the world.” The first sentence was crucial. I still have to ponder, but for the moment I finish this letter.

[M. 91]

11 February 2012

I think I have to correct myself regarding the ‘disclosure’-part of my last letter. Matter certainly appears because of the senses, but the *appearance* is not disclosed, i.e. the appearance does not precede ‘contact’ with the senses. But this does *not* mean that the appearance (feelings, percepts, intentions, etc.) is an interior (‘in me’ or ‘in’ the senses). Since matter only appears when it comes ‘into range’ of the senses, its appearance is an ‘indicator’ of the senses *being there* (eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, etc.). Matter never appears out of its own power, so its appearance is always a ‘reflection’ of the senses (including their ‘intentions’).

If this is not clear or if you think that I’m wrong, please correct me.

[M. 92]

11 February 2012

After I sent you the last mail, I had another insight. The question was: How can the senses ‘create’ our world without *adding* anything to it? How can they be responsible for the existence of phenomena without actually *inventing* so-called ‘qualia’, without *constructing* ‘things’, i.e. without ‘emanating’, ‘radiating’ or ‘hallucinating’ anything? The answer is simple and at least for me it was a little breath-taking: *They can by being filters!* They don’t *add*, they *filter out*, they *select*. And what is left is ‘our world’. In other words: Our phenomenal world only exists because of what we *not perceive*, because of what is *left out*. This is the true meaning of the ‘negatives’. I could not really understand this until now, because it cannot be understood until the working of the senses is understood (at least in principle).

[N. 65]

12 February 2012

Rather than presenting my arguments again, I will try to point out where I think you are (or were) failing to grasp what I was attempting to say. Let me begin:

Regarding MN 28: It seems to me that the difference you are pointing at comes from failing to grasp what I was trying to say. I don’t recall ever

saying that ‘internal’ is *solely defined* by the inability of senses to perceive themselves. (Though I might have carelessly expressed myself in the past, which led you to believe that that is what I meant, in which case my apologies.) You said: “All these organs are called internal, *despite the fact that one has to look at them with the eye or mind in order to discern and access them*,” but here I have to ask how would one even know that one’s body consists of the organs enumerated in MN 28 if not through *observation*. I indeed agree with you when you say that the meaning of ‘internal’ is limited to ‘one’s own body’ and to nothing else, but the reasons for that are different than what you suppose (I’ll explain it below). As for the liver, heart and other organs, they are not exempted from the six-sense base foundation—they are simply more particular aspects of one’s body which is a *unit*, a whole, and thus would probably, most of them, come under the sense of touch. (It’s not that simple, but I hope you get the point. Discussion about this would be a digression here.) In the same way, one’s bones are not called internal because they simply belong to one’s body (Western science tells us that too), they are internal because they are *my bones*, they are internal because they cannot experience themselves as bones but have to be known externally.

You say: “But my eye as I see it in the mirror or touch it with my hands is an *internal* eye according to MN 28, because it belongs to ‘this body’ like the kidneys.” This is absolutely so, but again the only way to know that that eye belongs to the body, the only way to know it is internal is externally, because internally the eye (or any other sense or bodily organ) cannot appear to itself. So the eye that you see in the mirror is indeed an internal eye, if by that you mean “*that* because of which there is seeing in the first place.” Thus an eye is *that* organ, that thing in the world because of which there is world. And it is this *dimension* ‘because of which’ that differentiates internal and external. And the same dimension, or rather the ignorance in regard to the same dimension is responsible for the appropriation of the world and senses (“that because of which one is a perceiver and conceiver of the world”). To put all of this simply: it is the appropriation of one’s body and senses as *mine* that makes them *internal* (cf. Ven. Ñāṇavīra saying that in the subject-object pair the subject doesn’t appear, and in the sense organ-sense object pair, the sense organ doesn’t

appear; ignorance in regard to this superposition and the *identification* of sense organs (i.e. one's body as a whole) and the subject occurs.)

I think the confusion also partly stems from the translation of MN 28 you've been reading. Here is the less readable, but in my opinion more literal alternative to the relevant passage from that Sutta:

“Friends, what is the earth element: There is internal earth element and external earth element. What is internal earth element. Whatever hard rough matter internally held as mine, such as hair of head and body, nails, teeth skin, flesh, nerves, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver pleura, lungs lower intestines, bowels, belly, excreta, and any other hard, rough internally held matter, all that is internal matter. All this internal earth element, and external earth element, go as earth element. That is not mine, am not that, it is not my self. This should be known as it really is, with right wisdom. Seeing this, as it really is, with right wisdom, the mind should be detached from the earth element, There comes a time when the external water element is agitated, at that time the external earth element is closed up, in it . That shows the agedness and impermanence of the earth element. So why hold on to this body of three hundred bones as this is mine, am that, it is my self. Again others may revile, blame, arouse and distress the bhikkhu. Then he knows, these unpleasant feelings arise with a cause. What is the cause? Contact is the cause. He reflects that contact is impermanent, feelings are impermanent, that perception is impermanent, determinations are impermanent, and that consciousness is impermanent. His mind springs forward with the sign and elements, is pleased, settled, and released. Others may treat that same bhikkhu in disagreeable, unwelcome, unkind ways, with the contact of hands, clods, sticks, and weapons. Then he knows, this body should be such, that it endures the contact of hands, clods, sticks and weapons.” (underlined by me)⁴⁶

However I think that the real confusion comes from the fact that you have partially understood the relationship between internal and external, but are now confusing it with the means you used for understanding it. Let me try to explain this, though I admit that I might be wrong here since it is

not easy to know what another person thinks. In an attempt of explaining this matter to you, I (and Ven. Ñāṇavīra) have been saying that, as long as there is the sense of ‘mine’, there will be internal, and when ‘mine’ has ceased in an *arahat*’s case the internal has ‘healed’ and what is left is this conscious body and name-and-matter externally (and even this external is different than the *puthujjana*’s external). It is ‘this conscious body’ that you refer to as ‘internal’ when you say “But my eye as I see it in the mirror or touch it with my hands is an *internal* eye according to MN 28, because it belongs to ‘this body’ like the kidneys.” In other words, if you decide to call the non-appropriated eye (an eye which is not regarded as ‘mine’) as internal, then the original ‘internal’ one has used to describe the appropriated senses of a *puthujjana* has to be called differently. That’s why the Suttas when they are ‘leading on’ use the term ‘internal’, but in the case of an *arahat* they simply say “this conscious body.” If you call both ‘internal’, which technically won’t be wrong, then ‘the leading on’ property is lost, which means that the Dhamma is obscured, and the explanation (a view) has set in.

You further said: “I, as my senses, can only *disclose what is already there* (dependent, of course, on the ‘capacity’ of my senses, which is certainly equal to *their* ‘interest’).” I agree with the paragraph on ‘disclosure’ in principle, which says more or less the same as what I’ve been trying to describe before: the eye sees the forms *beforehand*, which means that you discover the world as *already given* to you (disclosed) and then indeed when you say “It seems to me that *not* to allow things to exist independently is an indicator of self-view” is correct. When one’s Self recognizes that eye and forms operate independently, the mastery over the sight (and other senses) ceases, the Self ceases. Remember the point Ven. Ñāṇavīra made when he discovered that the Suttas say that “the eye *meets* the forms.” ‘Meeting the forms’ means that both are already there in the world, before the Self has any say in it.

(I wrote the above reply a couple of days ago, and the paragraphs below are in response to your latest emails)

In your last email you mentioned “*They can by being filters! They don’t add, they filter out, they select.* And what is left is ‘our world’.” Correct. They ‘filter out’, I would say ‘they orient themselves’. ‘Orientation’ is a

direction, a direction which then continues on into intentions (every intention is direction, but not every direction is intention—direction is a more general phenomenon than intention).

And you also wrote: “Our phenomenal world only exists because of what we *not perceive*, because of what is *left out*. This is the true meaning of the ‘negatives’.” I’m not sure about this though (do you mind saying something more). The phenomenal world exists only because the senses and the objects (which are all beyond our control) are oriented of their own accord. So yes, that which is ‘left out’ is certainly more fundamental than what we discovered through the orientation, but I would not go so far as to say that it is the main reason for the existence of phenomena. Also I don’t think that what is left out is more of a negative than a negative phenomenon that has appeared, it is again more fundamental (structurally speaking) than the phenomenal world in front of our eyes. (On a side note: you can think of the orientation as consciousness. I better repeat: *orientation*, not that which has come to be oriented, as consciousness, which simply tells you that senses and sense objects are not the only thing that is beyond your control—consciousness too, is out there with them. When this conscious body meets the objects, name-and-matter [All] are manifested externally... there is no room whatsoever left for ‘I’ to arise...)

[M. 93]

13 February 2012

If I understand you correctly, the dyad of internal/external with regard to the *puthujjana* is the dyad of ‘what I am’ (internal) and ‘what surrounds me’ (external). But with regard to the *arahat*, it would mean ‘that in the world because of which there is the world’ (internal) and ‘the world’ (external)—which (in the case of the *arahat*) is ‘this conscious body’ and ‘name-and-matter externally’. So, when using the terms ‘internal/external’, one should distinguish between the *arahat* or the *puthujjana* in order to avoid confusion with regard to the meaning. I think this is clear so far.

I have another question regarding MN 28:

[...] 1) when internally the eye is intact

2) and externally forms come into range
3) and there is a corresponding engagement,
4) then there is the appearing of the corresponding type of consciousness.

In your second-last letter you said that point No. 2 means that the eye sees the forms, but what does point No. 4 mean then? If the ‘corresponding type of consciousness’ is not seeing, what else is it?

Regarding: “Our phenomenal world only exists because of what we do *not perceive*, because of what is *left out*. This is the true meaning of the ‘negatives’.” I meant that with the arising of the senses, the ‘world’ somehow ‘falls apart’ in what is present (within range of the senses) and what is absent (or ‘hidden’) (out of range of the senses)—and that this is a requirement for the experience to occur at all. By ‘phenomenal’ I meant the positive or present part and what is ‘left out’ I called ‘negatives’.

May I ask you, whether there was a teacher to help you to understand these things, apart from the Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s writings?

[M. 94]

2 March 2012

In your last letter you mentioned *direction*. A lot of my confusion came from the assumption that there is only *one* direction, i.e. that everything has to be *in front of me* or *before me* in order to be perceptible. But I, or better: the senses, are *surrounded entirely* by the world, even if they receive their input only from one direction. So (for example) one’s visual field actually reaches *all around*. There is *no border*. There are only differences in detail and clarity, i.e. what is in front of me is most detailed and clear, while the rest of it becomes more and more vague and blurry. I somehow identified the external or objective or phenomenal with this one direction ‘before me’, so no wonder I had trouble to understand the proper meaning.

I also managed to ‘access’ the senses ‘*indirectly*’. The very fact that something *is present* points to the senses if grasped correctly. I’m not sure how to describe this properly but if something is present, it is ‘*de trop*’, it is somehow ‘added’, it appears as something *which could also not be*. And also as something which is not ‘self-made’, something which is ‘received’. This

characteristic is *inherent to all phenomena*. When people ask the question why there is something instead of nothing, then they are (at least partly) aware of this aspect. The answer to this question is the senses. Because of them, things *are*. With 'are' I mean not their 'substance' (*rūpa*), but their 'weight', their 'intensity'. The senses are '*burdened*' by the world, so to speak. No senses, no burden. Consciousness or presence is therefore '*burdensomeness*', which depends on the senses and that which offers *resistance* to the senses. I think the Buddha somewhere compared consciousness with spear heads (in the sense of being tortured). In the past I tried to grasp the meaning of presence (consciousness) without reference to this. The more I tried, the more empty the term appeared. Now I see that it can only be understood in relation to the senses, because without them, there would be no 'weight', no 'intensity' of anything.

Your notion that consciousness can be understood as *orientation* also points in this direction, as far as I can see, since 'weight' or 'intensity' requires orientation. But when the above mentioned insight came, it was more related to my suffering, so the '*burdensomeness*' predominated.

[M. 95]

10 March 2012

I think the 2nd paragraph of my last letter is wrong. The *subject* has crept in in the guise of the senses. This seems to happen whenever I do not regard consciousness as disclosure. The senses disclose the world, and because of this they are that in the world *because of which* ... You said in one of your past letters that one experiences the senses *directly* as that in the world because of which there is a world. To me this means that they are the very 'openings' through which the world manifests (instead of mere 'sensitive surfaces' or 'receptors', which 'hide' somewhere internally).

[M. 96]

31 March 2012

If you don't mind, I would like to add a few things.

1) Consciousness is said to depend on name-and-matter. And all name factors are said to originate with contact. So how can it be that eye-, ear-,

nose-, tongue-, body- and mind-consciousness are said to be there *before* contact? If the senses, their objects and sense-consciousness must be there in order for contact to occur, sense-consciousness cannot depend on contact.

2) Ven. Ñāṇavīra defines *saññā* as perception or quality like blue, red, etc. Perception (like other name factors) is said to depend on contact. And contact depends on senses, sense objects and sense-consciousness. So it is said, for example, that in dependence of eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. And depended on those three, contact. And depended on this contact, feeling, perception and intention. But how can we speak of form *before* perception? Ven. Ñāṇavīra himself said that (within this context) form must not be understood as bare matter (*rūpa*) but as already including shape and colour. But if this is the case, i.e. if an already shaped and coloured form/matter is there before contact and perception, and even before eye-consciousness, what is meant by perception then? If form in ‘eye and forms’ already includes shape and colour, what adds ‘perception’ to it? To me all this doesn’t make any sense. Which leads me to point No. 3.

3) Especially the Thai forest tradition is said to have produced *arahats*. But if one looks how they have defined those terms (like the aggregates etc.), it is far away from Ven. Ñāṇavīra and often enough from the Suttas: *rūpa* for example only means body; *saññā* is no longer perception but memory; *saṅkhārā* are thoughts. Not to mention other things. What does this mean? It either means that they are deluded or that it actually doesn’t matter how one defines those things. I don’t know what is worse. If, in order to become an *arahat*, it doesn’t matter whether (for example) I understand *saññā* as perception or memory, why should I waste my time to understand these things at all? I hope you know what I mean. I am quite sure that the Buddha was *not at all flexible* when it comes to the understanding of these things. I am of the conviction that *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhārā*, *viññāṇa*, etc. all have a certain and definite meaning. But this also means that not all the *bhikkhus* and lay people can be right at the same time. How could they? If *bhikkhu* A defines *saññā* as perception and *bhikkhu* B defines it as memory, one of them must be wrong, otherwise it doesn’t matter and there would be no point in teaching it at all. And that

both *bhikkhu* A and B can be *arahats*, despite their different understanding of certain key terms, is unimaginable for me.

4) Now one could say: Practise and you will understand (the Suttas), but a lot of monks have practised years or even decades and yet talk in a way which raises doubt in me. So if not even the practice brings the correct and unique understanding, how can I have hope? Quite recently I listened to talks of the Ven. Paññāvaddho (who passed away in 2004).⁴⁷ I was very impressed by him as a person and practitioner. But then it happened that he began to talk about *rūpa* as body and *saññā* as memory and (of course) the *citta* which never dies etc. And all this despite (or because?) he also studied the Suttas. How can this be? It is absolutely incompatible with Ven. Ñāṇavīra. But to be honest: I don't know who is right and who is wrong. If 20 or 30 years of restraint and meditation practice are not enough to know the truth and to liberate one, this way is not for me. One lifetime should be enough for someone who knows what he wants. This doesn't mean that I want to give up, of course. I cannot give up. But I see that I cannot rely on others, because they contradict themselves and also the Suttas. I don't want to become a parrot of some teacher, like so many others. They cling so tightly to their idols that they become blind and even quarrel with others. This is not for me.

* * *

My own experience tells me that matter 'is' through or because of its name. So called 'qualia' make matter exist. The description of matter makes it 'be'. Based on this, my last two letters can be refuted, I think. At the same time all phenomena appear like a 'contamination' to me, as something alien with unknown origin which could also not be. It almost appears like a 'simulation' of a world rather than a 'real' world. The 'real thing' is when *everything* is extinct. One cannot go further. While this is *nothing* from the point of view of the world, it is *real* because it cannot be destroyed. It can only be contaminated. While this contamination has no beginning, it is 'optional'. But I don't know if this makes any sense. It is not so easy to describe. Even if everything is annihilated (including the

individual), this 'no more' would remain as a fact. Phenomena are like an addition to 'it'. But 'it' cannot be said to exist. It only becomes 'obvious' by the fact that everything can be extinct. 'One' cannot fall out of it. Or one (as an individual) actually can, but this only shows that this individual ('one') is not oneself (which doesn't mean that one is something else). 'Nothing' is the 'normal' state. Everything else is 'too much'. This is how it often appears to me. Often enough only as a 'feeling'. And this guides me. No text has given this to me, but it influences how I read texts, which often enough leads to a refusal. Unfortunately my understanding of the Suttas and my belief in their truth often forces me to go against this feeling and to come up with such ideas which you know from my letters. Hopefully everything will fall into its place one day.

This is quite a lot of text, so I will stop here.

[M. 97]

8 April 2012

Perhaps I can save you the trouble to answer my past letters (but please feel free to answer to whatever you want, it is most appreciated). I pondered heavily (which seems to be the only type of 'meditation' which I can actually do regularly...) and now it is much more clear:

1) What we experience is actually *resistance* or *opposition*, different types of it. That which offers the resistance is *rūpa* or matter. The main *types* or *modes* of resistance/opposition are 'earthy', 'watery', 'fiery' and 'airy', so there are four types of *rūpa* or matter, the 'four elements' ('earth', 'water', 'fire', 'air'). These elements are *not things* but the *basis* for our experience of things in that they are offering resistance to the senses (which are themselves *rūpa*).

2) Only what offers resistance to the senses (*rūpa*) can be present or conscious. So there is actually no presence or consciousness independent or apart from resistance.

3) The *way* or *manner* in which matter is present (by being 'resistant') is its '*name*' (*nāma*). Basically, matter is present by being felt and perceived, so feeling and perception are inseparable from presence or consciousness.

4) There are basically *five ways* in which matter ('real' or 'imaginary') can be present, i.e. it can be *visible, audible, smellable, tastable and tangible*. These

are the sense *faculties* (not to be confused with the sense *organs*).

5) In order for resistance or opposition to be possible, there must be *the dyad of internal and external, i.e. the six senses (organs) and their corresponding objects*. The senses must be *intentionally directed towards the external*, they must be ‘*towards the world*’, they must, in a way, be ‘*pressed*’ against *that, which offers resistance to them*. They must more or less actively ‘touch’ instead of merely passively ‘being touched’. *I think that this ‘being towards the world’, this intentionality of the senses, is the ‘corresponding engagement’ of MN 28, which we were talking about*. But this kind of intentionality is not ‘mine’, since I have to see, hear, etc. whether I want it or not. So there is a difference between this intentionality of the senses and volition.

6) Since the senses are themselves *rūpa*, their own ‘impenetrability’ must be part of our experience, but in a special way. The intentionality of the senses is a kind of *continuous ‘outward expansion’ and keeps the object at distance*, so to speak. So the senses are *present in a ‘transparent’ way*. If this intentionality or ‘outward pressure’ would totally cease, *the experience would immediately stop due to lack of ‘friction’ or resistance*.

7) The space which surrounds us (including the space which the body occupies) is *opened up by the senses*, i.e. it depends on their above-mentioned intentionality, their ‘being towards’.

8) For this reason I have to disagree with Ven. Ñāṇavīra when he says in his Note on PHASSA (underlining is mine):

“If experience were confined to the use of a single eye, the eye and forms would not be distinguishable, they would not appear as separate things; there would be just the experience describable in terms of *pañc’upādānakkhandhā*.”⁴⁸

Forms are external and this is only possible when they are ‘kept at distance’ by one’s eye or ‘glance’, which is constantly ‘pushing outwards’, so the eye and therefore the dyad is part of one’s visual experience. But I agree that the eye is ‘transparent’ and *insofar ‘absent’*, but it is *not totally absent*.

9) *I finally found a reason for impermanence*. You certainly remember that I could not understand why impermanence is a *necessary ‘feature’* of

existence. But since experience/existence depends on resistance, and since resistance can only be experienced when there is intentionality, i.e. a 'pressing against', which is an effort—all experience has to cease when that effort is no longer made. I came to this understanding quite unexpectedly, but certainly as a result of my preceding efforts. In a 'flash' I could understand the reason for breathing, heartbeat/blood circulation, digestion, i.e. all this 'whirling around' in the body. All this effort is only in order to keep up the 'friction' which makes experience (of resistance) or existence possible. I understand (to a shallow degree) that this effort is rooted in blindness and ignorance. 'Being' depends on 'pressing' and 'pushing'. After that I experienced a kind of nausea, because it was not at all nice to see that. And I also never expected it to be like that. But I have to add that I'm still the same person. Still the same fears and desires. But the 'view' part has certainly changed again. It's a lot of small steps, not one big step. But some of the small one's are much more noteworthy than others.

10) Now a lot of things from the Suttas make more sense to me, for example *paṭiccasamuppāda*: I think that the 'determinations' are the kind of intentionality (not volition) which I mentioned above. The kind of intentions which are rooted in blindness. The 'intentionality' of the eye, for example. And because of them, consciousness is possible, seeing for example. And with that (inseparable by time) comes the 'naming' of the resistance. In that way the dyad of senses and sense objects becomes obvious. Depended on this contact. Then feeling. Then craving. Then holding (which is more a kind of being held or being possessed, I think). Etc. All this is not at all fully clear yet, but I think I know better now *how to approach these things*. Another example is the famous: "All determinations are impermanent, all determinations are suffering, all things are not-self."⁴⁹ Since all this 'pressing and pushing' is rooted in ignorance, it is necessarily impermanent and of the nature of suffering. So all *things* (whatever is seen, heard, etc.), which come to be because of those 'intentions' and 'efforts', must be of the same impermanent and suffering nature and are therefore beyond one's control, i.e. since 'one' is not doing it (volition), one has to '*suffer*' them. There is certainly much more depth to it, but at least I know how to scratch the surface now.

I will stop for now. But I want to add that there is no way to understand you or the Suttas without making an effort to do so, guided by and based on one's own experience. I still feel very shaky. At some times the understanding seems to be 'gone' and reappears only after a new effort.

[N. 66]

11 April 2012

Reply to the letter of 31 March 2012:

1) The answer is simple, but not easy to grasp. Consciousness depends on name-and-matter, but name-and-matter depends on consciousness too. Remember the simile of the two sticks supporting each other. This means that if you are trying to *describe* (or explain, or define) one of them, you will have to use the terms provided by the other, thus if you want to answer what consciousness depends upon, you will do so in the terms of *nāmarūpa*, and *vice versa*: for defining *nāmarūpa* you have to use the negative nature of consciousness. So when you say "before contact" this has to be understood in structural terms only, not temporal. The *whole picture* is already there, what we are distinguishing are different parts of that mutually dependent hierarchy.

2) The same answer applies here, more or less. Form precedes perception structurally, but indeed you are right, you cannot talk about 'pure' form, you need contact, you need *nāmarūpa* in order to define, name, or describe anything in this experience. If you were not contacted, matter would be inconceivable. But when you do conceive it correctly (I use 'conceive' here just to convey the point, not in a sense used in the Suttas), you see it as a structurally more fundamental component of your experience.

3) I know exactly what you mean here. I think of myself as someone who follows Thai tradition in 'flesh' (my ordination, ways of performing duties, simple day-to-day things, etc.), but not in spirit. In order to understand this, I would like you to call to mind Ven. Ñāṇavīra's discussion⁵⁰ about the two prevalent types of people practising the Dhamma: people inclined towards faith, and people inclined towards wisdom or discernment, and how these two types roughly correspond to Asian and European cultures. Having been exposed to (but never really taken any interest in) the

teachings of Thai Ajahns, I can say (without being arrogant) that I only accept Ajahn Chah as someone who most likely liberated himself from suffering. That doesn't mean that there are no *arahats* in Thailand, but, in order to see whether someone is, that person will either have to be able to articulate themselves in correct terms, or you will have to go and live with them. And this is where the problem arises. For a 'faith' type of person, detailed instruction is not always necessary, they put a tremendous amount of their time and effort into practice based on the faith they have in the Teachings. Because of that, very general or even less accurate terms and explanations of the Dhamma can bring the sufficient amount of understanding in them. Having obtained the right view, their way of progressing would continue through the aspect of faith, which would make them unquestionably practise the Buddha's instructions. This kind of practice might sound more pleasant, but it is certainly more dangerous, since all it takes is one wrong presentation of the Dhamma, which one would not appropriately question because of one's tendency to faith, and all of one's efforts and work will be presented through the same wrong light. And even when faith-inclined people do understand the Dhamma, their ability to correctly convey it to another is limited. That doesn't mean they are wrong, it simply means that they are not accurate enough for inducing the right view in another person. (The Buddha said that is a skill in itself.) So, when Thai Ajahns talk about *saññā* as "memory," it is not necessarily wrong, but it is certainly not correct, and knowing my own dispositions (I am definitely not a faith type), I cannot relate to it.

"If, in order to become an *arahat*, it doesn't matter whether (for example) I understand *saññā* as perception or memory, why should I waste my time to understand these things at all?" For a faith type, this might not matter, since they covered the necessary basis through their unquestioning practice, but for someone who isn't that type, understanding *saññā* as perception can make a whole world of difference.

"If *bhikkhu* A defines *saññā* as perception and *bhikkhu* B defines it as memory, one of them must be wrong—otherwise it doesn't matter and there would be no point in teaching it at all." One of them is wrong, that will be the one whose explanation is less in conformity with the Suttas (i.e. "memory" is etymologically farther than "perception" from the Pāli term *saññā*). However that mistake pertains to one's teaching abilities and

discernment, not necessarily to the fact that he might be free from suffering. If that person actually is an *arahat*, and if they suddenly acquire philosophical and phenomenological knowledge of the Sutta terms, they would most likely correct their previous interpretation of *saññā*, and ‘update’ it with the newly acquired skills of *communication*.

If on the other hand someone who is supposedly an *arahat* talks about “eternal *citta*” or “the real Self,” I would be wary of whatever that person has to say, since the notion of “eternal mind” in however vague form, needs more than a little semantic brushing-up for it not to be seriously misleading, which implies the underlying wrong view and lack of understanding in the person endorsing that term.

This is why the safest path is to refer to the Suttas as the main source of information, and use everything else only as a reference to it.

And to your question (from the 13th of February) whether there was a teacher to help me: No, there was no teacher involved for me. It was the Suttas and Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s writings.

4) One can practise rightly only with the right view. If the right view is absent, 50 years of practice won’t make a difference. (This is not quite correct, since for 50 years one can develop significant concentration, restraint and even wisdom; such a person theoretically wouldn’t need as much instruction as someone who is just starting. On the other hand, a person can also develop a significant amount of wrong views during the course of 50 years, so I guess it all depends on the authenticity of that individual.)

Your concern about parroting the ideas of the famous teachers is valid and has its place in building your capacities for discernment. That doesn’t mean that you should reject everything but the Suttas, just use it with caution until you develop your own criteria based upon those very Suttas.

You also wrote: “My own experience tells me that matter ‘is’ through or because of its name...” I can’t say that I fully understand what you mean here but, provided I do, I can say the following:

‘Nothing’ is not more real than ‘something’. Both are equal parts of experience and cannot exist without each other. The suffering in relation to them is the problem, and that’s where the solution has to be looked for. Becoming aware of nothingness can help you out in realising the

impermanence of things in your world which are usually taken for granted, but it won't free you from them, since they are not the problem.

Correct me if I misunderstood you, but even that 'it', that 'no more' fact which becomes apparent when everything is annihilated, is still a *thing*, a *phenomenon*—it appears, and as such its only certain nature is to disappear. In simple terms—*nothing* ceases too.

Reply to the letter of 8 April 2012:

1) Yes.

2) Yes.

3) Yes.

5) In principle this is correct. But the senses don't have to exclusively only touch or only be touched. Sometimes they are one, sometimes the other, and sometimes both. "Being towards the world" means inheriting that primordial orientation of our experience at face value before it reaches the levels of volition (which is already within it).

6) Yes, but... (look no. 8)

7) Yes.

8) Forms are not "kept at distance," the distance is revealed by the eye encountering the forms. The distance is secondary (but as Ven. Ñāṇavīra pointed out, there is no time involved in its arising). The senses indeed discover the resistance (of the form), but it is the same resistance that defines them as senses, they cannot be said to exist independently. This means that *both*, senses and its objects are there in the world, *defining* each other, or even better: *colliding* with each other. The result of the 'collision' is that which determines the appearance of that particular sense experience. The only way to distinguish the two components of this 'collision' is to witness it from the outside either via a different sense or reflexively. Thus Ven. Ñāṇavīra is correct in what he said above, but the problem is that this can never be verified directly (it will always remain on the level of intellect), since the experience of one sense only, without any reflexive input, is not conceivable.

The reason why the eye is not "totally absent" for you is because it is very difficult to remove or outline the input of one's reflexion in the experience. If it's not absent, it means that it appears, and what appears is the *result* of eye and forms colliding (meeting each other), which means

that neither eye nor forms can actually appear (by themselves). That's why for example people with Daltonism perceive things differently—the matter their eye balls consist of is different than the matter of most people, which means that when their eyes and forms collide, the result of this will be the inability to perceive certain colours (or rather perceiving them as different shades of gray). Another example is microscopic changes to the brain matter (injuries, high blood pressure, etc.) can result in a completely different way of experiencing your body (i.e. your world), which means that the difference of perception comes from either perceiving the different things or modifying the matter of the senses *through which* things are perceived—either way it is the matter (*rūpa*) that changes. Obviously, for an individual having these conditions, the experience is real, as for you and me. It is only in comparison *between* people that the differences become apparent, and we can establish what's 'normal' and what is an anomaly. Colour-blind people can spend their whole lives without realising they are colour-blind. The point I'm trying to make is whether it is the senses or its objects, they are both *rūpa*, they are both *there* in the world. The result of their meeting determines the direction of your experience. That meeting takes place outside of the scope of your volition and it is beyond your control—hence the constant danger of falling ill and dying. This is obviously over-simplified (I left out the possibility of intentionally changing your experience, which result in the change of matter).

Perhaps you can understand what I mean if you think of the eye and forms (and the rest) as *one* thing, and the dyad can be understood as two reflexively (or through other senses) distinguished aspects of the *same* thing. You know how sometimes people ask that when, for example, you see things, are you seeing things or are you seeing your eye seeing things (or experiencing changes in the material structure of your eye, induced by that thing you are looking at). In principle this is correct, the Buddha said that the whole world is contained within this six foot long body, the only problem is that people who make statements like the one above *assume* both the existence of an eye on one side, and the independent form (objective world) on the other side. (They also assume that eye and forms are *in space*, which holds them both together.) What you are experiencing is a form-being-exposed-to-another-form or simply 'an eye seeing forms'.

But neither of those forms, one modifying/one modified, are *yours*, though one ‘closer’ to you tends to be associated with the Self, i.e. *my* eye. So, if the experience would be confined to a single sense and without reflexion, all you would experience is modified-form, or simply *rūpa*. The distinction between my eye, forms, or molecular changes in my retina and so on, are all secondary—the original experience is an experience of a single (modified) form disclosing space. Does this make any sense? I can clarify it but I have to see first how you understand it.

(A digression: speaking of “modified-form”: it is this form-being-exposed-to-another-form, this *one* thing, that discloses *space*; eye and forms are secondarily distinguished within it. And when I say “it discloses space,” I don’t mean ‘introduces’, I mean it is not *in*, but *of* space. Ven. Ñāṇavīra already talked about this.)

9) Again, I agree with this in principle. However when you say “pressing against,” which is an effort, this ‘effort’ must not be understood as something which you are doing. The effort you are talking about, the effort of resistance, is not a form of *action* (*kamma*). What is important to see is that your action, your whole experience, depends upon this ‘friction’ of matter, which is outside of your reach (remember: *rūpa* is always a step below) by being outside of your reach you cannot have any control over it, by not being able to control it its impermanence will become apparent, by seeing it as impermanent you will see everything else that depends upon it as impermanent too. The reason for your nausea might be because you were appropriating (i.e. feeling directly responsible for) the ‘effort’ of your *rūpa* (heartbeats, blood, etc.) and missing out on its relationship with your intentions and volition. Just keep going and hopefully your ‘Self’ will be slowly squeezed out of the picture.

10) You can reconsider this last paragraph in the light of things I said above and let me know if it raises any questions.

I would like to focus on one point for now, since it is the most tough one and the most important one for me. Regarding point No. 8, I would be grateful if you could clarify this further. But first I will try to convey my understanding.

I can indeed think of the eye and forms as two different aspects of *one* thing but only if by 'eye' you mean that 'thing' which I can sense in my face, because otherwise I see no way to distinguish eye and forms. So as long as experience is not limited to *seeing*, I have no problem to distinguish eye and forms and to recognize them as different aspects of *one* experience. But when I try to limit myself to visual experience alone, I don't see how we can still speak of a 'collision', because visual experience alone seems to give me only *one* side of the whole, i.e. it only gives me the 'world' in 'being-in-the-world'. Therefore I don't see how Ven. Ñāṇavīra's thought experiment (the one eye) can be valid, not even in theory. There seem to be *structural reasons* which forbid this. Forms are *always on the other side*, hence one has to look at them. But this cannot take place without being grounded by means of a body, which is 'here' and *surrounded* by the forms.

In other words: I don't see form-being-exposed-to-another-form in visual experience alone. I understand why—in principle—the eye cannot be distinguished from form in visual experience alone, but I don't understand how forms can be forms without being environmental (hence the necessity for an eye or body 'here', i.e. the necessity for *more* than visual experience alone). If at all, I can only 'imagine' it when observation is impossible, but in such a case we could only say afterwards that there were 'forms alone'.

I hope this is enough input for you in order to clarify further what you meant.

[N. 67]

12 April 2012

Rather than going into detailed explanation (which I can do later), I think that I can pin-point the problem we have here—the double nature of the eye as a sense organ: visual and tactile. If you remember, Ven. Ñāṇavīra mentions a few times that the eye, apart from seeing the object, also *touches* it. I think that you have probably omitted (or not thoroughly considered) this fact and that is why when you talk about eye and forms, the transition, the movement, you make from ‘eye’ *here* to the environmental ‘forms’ seems fundamental, although it isn’t. Let us try reconsidering all of our previous discussions through investigating ‘ear’ and ‘sounds’, which although more ambiguous, is certainly a less complicated object for contemplation.

I might be wrong, you might have already considered all of this, and the dual nature of the eye, but I need to check, before I get into more details.

[M. 99]

12 April 2012

Yes, I remember, but I’m not sure if the double nature of the eye is ‘the stumbling block’. But ‘dual nature’ is nevertheless a key word with regard to this problem, because *I cannot ‘think away’ my bodily presence* whether I see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think. I don’t know how to describe this properly, but my body is present as ‘one mass’ and the senses are ‘*integrated*’ in that more or less heavy, warm and tingly ‘mass’ or ‘lump’, which gives me pleasure and pain, which is the bearer of affectivity, of ‘how I feel’. I just cannot imagine a world of *only* forms or *only* sounds. I tried it, of course, but as far as I can see, it is just not ‘real’. In a way, what I see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think goes ‘through the body’, alters one’s mood and often results in bodily activity. So forms, sounds, etc. are the surroundings of the body which I described above. Of course, the body also belongs to the forms, sounds, etc., i.e. I can find it ‘out there’, but insofar as it is *my* body, it is never completely environmental (like the bodies of others).

I hope this somehow makes sense.

[M. 100]

14 April 2012

I think I can locate my problem more clearly now. If I understand you correctly, one could say that forms are at the *border* ('point of contact') of the eye, so the eye in 'eye and forms' is itself an 'internal' space (it is of space), limited and defined by the forms (and *vice versa*). But this kind of transparent/empty eye, which is of the nature of space, is certainly not the eye which most people think of when they think about their eyes. They think about their eyes as something which they can *see* and *touch* or *sense* in their face. And *this* kind of eye appears to be *in* space and not of space. This kind of thinking happened to me also, which leads to the confusion. And it is still confusing!

At the moment I cannot say more, but I just wanted to let you know my 'progress', which might influence what you write to me.

[M. 101]

16 April 2012

1. I can't help thinking that 'being-in-the-world' or 'contact' (which is the same) is just the *puthujjana's explanation* of the experience. And what the Buddha called 'the All' is just the *most general description* of this being-in-the-world.

2. This 'insight' came shortly after I grasped the correct meaning (at least I think so) of the senses, which you tried to explain to me. All the philosophical problems which I tried to solve by understanding this topic cannot be solved on that level. On the contrary: they actually *originate* there. Perhaps the existentialists have described this being-in-the-world most accurately, but this alone is not enough. As far as I can see one has to 'switch' at this stage of description to the five aggregates, i.e. from the 'content' to the 'constituents' of the experience.

3. 'The All' is said to cease. But it cannot cease without that change of perspective. Without seeing the aggregates one automatically takes for granted that 'I am in the world' and acquires all kinds of different views based on that. One cannot speak of eye and forms, ear and sounds, etc. independent of or prior to the experience (the five aggregates), so what most people think comes first, comes actually second. The term 'contact'

describes the (wrongly assumed) *secondary* nature of the *experience*. In a sense, even the term 'experience' has this aroma, i.e. it implies that 'I' and 'world' come first, and 'experience' comes second. But what is thought of as being a *secondary* 'contact' or 'meeting' is actually the *thing* which comes *first*. So there is no 'contact' of two independent things (like eye and forms) which is or results in experience. Instead the experience is the '*one thing*' and can (*wrongly*) be described in terms of the coming-together of independent subject (senses) and objects.

I wonder why 'insights' of all kinds seem to prefer the night to occur.

[M. 102]

17 April 2012

I hope that all these letters with their change of views don't make answering a strain for you. But from my point of view these updates are necessary.

1. *Regardless* of what I said before, I think I made a mistake again, but this mistake is not so easy to point out: I thought that the eye ends where the forms begin and *vice versa*, i.e. I regarded the eye as an internal space *enclosed* by forms (with actually *no distance* between eye and forms). But as I see *now*, forms are *external* to the eye, they *don't* begin where the eye ends, they are *beyond* the eye. But in order to understand *this*, I had to understand *distance* first. How? By seeing that being-in-the-world *precedes* contact (structurally).

2. In other words: The eye (being spatial itself) is located in a space that *extends* beyond its boundaries. In other words: *The eye brings along with itself the very space in which it is located*. Contact with forms occurs in *that* space. So to be in the world necessarily includes the space which is *external* to oneself. One is *not encapsulated* by the world as a bubble of air is in water. Instead one is located in 'one's own' space (the space which *extends* one's boundaries), so to speak, and this space is 'populated' by all the different things and beings.

3. While it is certainly true that one's world, as one knows it, comes to be by means of contact, that very contact needs a *real* foundation, which is being-in-the-world. I think that I reversed that relation in my last letters when I said that 'contact' comes first, which is *idealism*. But the *realism*,

which assumes that without the senses there would still be space occupied by things, is also wrong, since the space is disclosed by the senses, i.e. it is *their* space. This is how I see it now.

[N. 68]

8 May 2012

Don't worry about sending me too many emails when your mind changes and you feel like updating what you said before. It's actually even better to write to me, since sometimes I might spend time explaining and writing about something you have already arrived at by yourself.

Reply to the letter of 16 April 2012:

1. Yes, but apart from being the most general description of being-in-the-world (in the case of the *puthujjana*), it must be said that it does not require that being of being-in-the-world—it is more fundamental.

2. Correct. I didn't want to bring it up earlier, but I've noticed that you were regarding being-in-the-world, which we all picked up from the existential philosophy, as being some sort of fundamental mode of experience, which resulted in the inability to understand what is meant by senses and its objects. All of the existentialists' terms, definitions and descriptions, however accurate, still imply *bhava*, they all imply Self, and in order for one to uproot it, one has to start thinking in different, more general and more precise terms, e.g. the five-(holding-)aggregates.

3. Again, I have nothing to add here. This is more or less what I was trying to say.

Reply to the letter of 17 April 2012:

1. I think I can almost follow what you are trying to say here, but now I have to ask what do you mean by "being-in-the-world"? Is this the experience as a whole, as one knows it in the act of an ordinary reflection, or do you mean by it the fundamental mutual dependence of *viññāṇa-nāmarūpa* (i.e. the All)? The difference between the two (in this context here) is in *being* (*bhava*)—the former reveals it, the latter precedes it (and doesn't require it).

2. I'm afraid I have to disagree here: the eye is not in space which also somehow contains other things that extend *beyond* the boundaries of the eye. Yes, the eye 'brings' the space as you correctly put it, but you cannot say that *that* eye is also located *in* the same space. The eye (and forms) is of space or to put it differently: the *extent* of eye is the *extent* of space. It is within the given experience (singular and spatial) of eye-and-forms [there], that you distinguish my 'eye' [here] and forms (in this case —'objects') [yonder]. Since this 'eye' here and everything else yonder is *within* that spatial 'there', this lump of flesh in my head and everything else seen by it, appear as something that is revealed in space. It is this 'here' and 'yonder' that define space as we know it, they shape the spatiality of space, so to speak. Indeed, if the spatiality is not revealed by the fundamental eye-and-forms, neither 'here' nor 'yonder' would be distinguishable. Nevertheless it is through this *secondary* distinction of the two (here and yonder) that 'there' becomes apparent—the space is revealed. It is because of this that 'space' as a phenomenon, despite the fact that the fundamental aspects of one's experience are *already* spatial, will always be secondary when it comes to a phenomenological attending of one's own experience. On the other hand, the fundamental picture cannot be reached as long as space maintains a tacit assumption of priority. This is all a heavy digression. As I said, it might be prudent to consider some other sense, ear and sound perhaps, not eye and forms, because of its already dual nature (visual and tactile).

3. The *real* foundation of contact is oriented 'matter' (or simply consciousness & matter). Being-in-the-world, by implying 'being' lacks this fundamentality (of course, I do realize that you might be using the term in a different sense, in which case we will have to agree on a certain 'common ground' for using this and other similar definitions.)

Have a look at your previous letter (before your mind changed again), most of the things you said were, the way I understood them, quite correct (especially the part about what people think comes first, while it actually comes second).

I hope this helps. I'm sure it will raise further questions, so please don't hesitate to write back (regardless of how many times).

I was about to write another letter to you, when it arrived. You already noticed that I change my mind quite often with regard to these matters. This is because there always seems to be a missing part—regardless of how I approach that topic.

At one point in your last letter you asked what I mean by ‘being-in-the-world’. In my unsent letter I tried to clarify this for myself. What does it mean to ‘be’ or to ‘exist’? Neither science nor logic can help here. I have to ask myself what it means.

From childhood on I had this feeling of alienation. And this feeling tells me what ‘being’ means. In a sense it *is* being. In order to ‘be’ one must ‘come in addition’, and the only way to ‘come in addition’ is birth, i.e. coming into the world. Oneself is that which is ‘too much’, oneself is the ‘alien’. And everything which comes in contact with oneself *partakes* of this ‘being’, i.e. it *appears*.

I’m not sure if this makes any sense to you (the way I expressed it). But as far as my own understanding is concerned this aspect cannot be omitted, since it is the core of my suffering. I can certainly try to express the same thing in more ‘neutral’ terms: One can only ‘be’ against the ‘background’ of the world, i.e. one ‘is’ by being born into the world, which is found to be already there. The only way to ‘be’ is ‘in the world’, but one is never *of* the world, despite the fact that being-in-the-world requires a body, which is of course *of* the world, but neither the matter of the body nor the matter of the world ‘are’ by themselves in the above-mentioned sense of being ‘too much’, i.e. they ‘are’ not in the way ‘I’ am. So my being-in-the-world can *never* be explained in terms of matter. Science or psychology have nothing to say about the nature of consciousness, however much they try.

Earlier I thought that the world is the ‘alien’ which somehow comes to *me* by means of the senses. But as I understand now, it is the other way round. *I* am the alien, who comes to the world, thereby making it appear (as ‘background’).

Because I am born into the world, there is—as you called it—‘oriented matter’, which is not a *creation* of matter but only an *orientation*. I should add here that *I don’t want to say that oneself is a subject*. Oneself is also

apparent. But this ‘being apparent’ must be understood *existentially* (if that makes any sense to you), i.e. as *being-there* without the ‘scientific’ assumption of an ‘intermediate organ’ by which one perceives oneself or is perceived from an external point of view.

So my senses are always apparent, because I cannot ‘be’ without them, i.e. they are that because of which I am ‘surplus’ (= being) in the world. *What is usually called ‘bodily consciousness’ is just ‘being there’.* This is crucial in order to understand what I mean (even if it is all wrong). From my current point of view it is a *fatal error* to include this ‘bodily consciousness’ under the *sense of touch*. One’s *whole body* (except ‘dead parts’ like hair etc.) is *there* (‘conscious’) against the ‘background’ of an *external* world (to which the *matter* of one’s body also belongs, *but a body is not one’s own by virtue of its matter*). For this reason I have to repeat to myself that Ven. Ñāṇavīra is wrong when he says that in visual experience alone the eye would not be distinguishable from forms, because an *inapparent* eye is not *my* eye at all. Ven. Ñāṇavīra seems to think that, at least in principle, it should be possible to *anesthetize the whole body*, i.e. to *remove* the ‘being’ while at the same time *keep* the ‘perception’ of externals. I regard this as impossible.

I stop here for the moment. For now I cannot see things differently without the feeling of denying or omitting ‘being’. But I would like to hear from you, where I am wrong and why. To me, it feels like *progress* (compared to earlier views).

[M. 104]

11 May 2012

I would like to clarify the matter, because I’m afraid of being misunderstood.

My body, i.e. the body which I can move around in the world, is a *phenomenal* body. The senses of *my* body, i.e. *my* senses, are therefore *things* which are ‘under my control’. (I’m not referring to *mastery* here but to ‘having a movable body’ and of being able to initiate actions, something which the Buddha seems to acknowledge in AN 6:38.) The point is that *my* senses *must be apparent* in order to be *my* senses at all, since I cannot ‘own’ or ‘command’ something which is not present.

But when you talk about the senses you seem to refer to something *entirely different*. The same with Ven. Ñāṇavīra in his example of the single eye:

“If experience were confined to the use of a single eye, the eye and forms would not be distinguishable, they would not appear as separate things; there would be just the experience describable in terms of *pañc’upādānakkhandhā*.”⁵¹

I can’t help, but here (contrary to what he says elsewhere) he seems to regard the eye as *subject*. But *my* eye is never subject, it is a *thing*, a *phenomenon*, an *aspect* or *part* of the *phenomenal* body which I am able to ‘command’ to a limited degree. So *my* eye *is* and *must* be distinguishable from forms, otherwise it is *not my eye at all*. An eye, disconnected from the phenomenal body would cease to be an ‘instrument’, would cease to be a basis for ‘being in the world’, because ‘being in the world’ is ‘being phenomenal’.

Therefore ‘the All’ is about *my* senses, i.e. the *phenomenal* (movable) body and its phenomenal environment. Your approach to the All seems to be different (and similar to my earlier take, in which I regarded the senses as ‘openings’). If I understand you correctly, the eye is not *in* the world as an aspect of one’s *phenomenal embodiment*, but instead the eye is a constitutive part of the world, in the sense that a change of the matter of the eye *is* a change of one’s world. Or more broadly: What *for you* is damage of Mathias’ *brain* is *for me* damage of *the world*.

At the moment I’m not sure whether these two approaches can be reconciled. But ‘having a body’ cannot be omitted. Between the phenomenal eye that I *have* and the eye which *constitutes my world* is a difference in ‘appearance’.

I’m not sure whether this clarification was actually necessary, but I want to be sure to be understood correctly (as far as possible).

Here are my replies to your last two letters. After you have finished with them, you can read the essay I'm sending: *Appearance and Existence*.

Reply to the letter of 8 May 2012:

The bodily-consciousness you are referring to is your experience as a whole and I don't see it being different or against the 'background' of the external world. Your body-in-the-world is *the world*. And no matter how ambiguous 'being there' might feel, the fact is that six-sense-base is there (i.e. sights, ...thoughts), giving itself to be oriented differently. See what I say below. That 'being there', the 'surplus' you are referring to, is most certainly a phenomenon, and the scientific outlook [of bodily organs] cannot reach it. What you have to do is see your sense organs as independent objects in your experience, but in order not to fall into a scientific view you have to see them *through* that 'being there', or see them while not abandoning the view of *being*. Only in that way you might be able to see that your very being is actually determined by them.

You wrote: "For this reason I have to repeat myself that Ven. Ñāṇavīra is wrong when he says that in visual experience alone the eye would not be distinguishable from forms, because an *inapparent* eye is not *my* eye at all."

You just said what I've been pointing at all this time: the "inapparent eye" is there, and correct—it is not *your* eye at all. That's the whole point. If you see the inapparent eye as something because of which there are sights (of things), those things that you see on account of it will cease to be appropriated by you. (Cf. Ven. Ñāṇavīra's remarks on *avijjā*, where he says that it has to be "unscrewed," by seeing that your Self depends on [is directly determined by] something which is not yours [i.e. impermanent]; only in this way can you cease to regard your Self as yours.) This is why Ven. Ñāṇavīra said in his 'Early Letters' (a few insights before his stream-entry), that *paṭiccasamuppāda*'s *salāyatana* can only be known *reflexively*—in other words: the eye doesn't appear directly. Far from being the unfortunate thing, this just shows that reflexion (one's mind) is inseparably connected (more accurately: determined) with one's senses; reflexion is a solid and palpable occurrence and plays a fundamental role in determining one's *being-there*. (E.g. the way you regard your senses is

the way you access them reflexively, there is no other way to them. And consequently it is because of this that the escape from the senses is possible.)

Reply to the letter of 11 May 2012:

Try thinking things differently: instead of your senses being there *because* of your body, regard your ‘body’ as the product of your individual senses. The *order of things* makes all the difference in the practice of Dhamma.

Also it seems to me (I might be wrong though), that you are confusing the terms “apparent” and “present.” I don’t see them as synonyms. *Present* means conscious, but not necessarily *aware*. *Apparent* on the other hand for me implies *awareness*, something you reflect on and shows itself clearly (even as an ambiguous thing). Consequently, with the refinement of your reflection, the things that were once ‘apparent’ are replaced or ‘updated’ with now more apparent things, and so on—the progression of wisdom.

You wrote: “So my eye is and must be distinguishable from forms, otherwise it is not my eye at all.” Well done, it is not your eye at all.

You wrote: “Between the phenomenal eye that I have and the eye which constitutes my world is a difference in ‘appearance’.” Exactly, and for the *puthujjana* ‘appearance’ means ‘existence’ (i.e. *bhava*).

[M. 105]

4 June 2012

Thank-you for your answer, especially for the essay.

If I understand you correctly, you say that one’s body, as one knows it, can only be experienced through the six senses—like everything that is not one’s body.

I’m still not sure if I can follow you here. I will try to explain what I mean: Whatever I see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think—I am somehow *simultaneously* or *co-conscious* of my body *as the means to act*. I am able to change my perceptions by *moving*, and the means to do that is the body, since this is *what the body is for*. But this body is given in a way which I *cannot* describe in terms of the *external side of contact*. On the contrary, this body is the *requirement* for any contact with externals. It is a body ‘to whom

things matter'. Being stung by a wasp or being hungry are examples which 'reveal' the kind of body, which I mean here. And I don't see how this body can be properly described *just* in terms of what is seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched or thought.

I think the ability to act is *inseparable* of being. Therefore the *means* of acting, namely the body, must be given simultaneously with the world. This is how I understand the All now: One's six-based *body* (to whom things matter and which is the means to act) and the *world* (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, ideas).

While I agree that the body *also* belongs to the world, I argue that it is *not this belonging* to the world which defines it as a *body* (in the aforementioned sense).

I don't think that the body is 'constructed' out of sense-data. Instead the dyad of body/environment is a *scheme* or *template* which *comes first*, i.e. which (structurally) *precedes* any 'perception' in that the ('organization' of the) latter is based on the first. Fundamentally I can not only *not* decide *what* I experience, I can also *not* decide *how* I experience it, referring here to the scheme or structure of internal/external. This is determined (structurally) *before* I experience anything. The tree is always external, while the toothache is not. My body is the only thing which can belong to *both* sides, i.e. internal and external.

So what I want to say here is that we do not 'construct' this dyad of body/environment out of some 'raw experience' which is *nondual*—instead this dyad comes first (structurally) and determines how we experience whatever we experience.

Ven. Nāṇavīra seems to see it the other way round, because he says that in the case of one eye alone the experience would be *nondual*, i.e. eye and forms would *not be distinguishable*. And since this holds also true for the other senses, we have in fact reduced 'the All' from six *pairs* to six *singles*.

I would say: If it cannot act, it is not alive. But in order to act one needs a *discernable* body. One cannot act *as* the world but only *in* the world. So 'having a body' must be part of any experience whatsoever, therefore the All consists of six pairs and not six singles. I think the five aggregates are *that which is 'organized' into this scheme or structure of internal/external*, i.e. matter, which can be either internal or external or both and its

appearance and presence, which is different dependent on whether matter is internal or external and to which pair of the All it belongs.

We can approach the experience from two sides: Either by its *structure* or by its *content*. The All is the structure or way of organization of whatever is experienced and therefore determines *beforehand* whether ‘something’ is experienced as belonging to oneself or to the environment (or both). The five aggregates are a description of that ‘something’ which can be found to be organized into that structure of the All—whether it belongs to oneself or is external.

This is how I see it at the moment. I hope the relation of this to your latest replies is still visible. I want to say that the senses themselves are present in each experience but not just ‘indirectly’, since the All is not a dyad of subject/object but a scheme of localization and organization, which is absolute, i.e. which cannot be altered in any way. So strictly speaking one cannot say for example that the eye sees forms. One can only discern a body as means of action, to which the eye belongs, and a world, to which the forms belong. And when I say “one can discern,” I don’t mean another sense which ‘perceives’ this dyad, but instead a *scheme* which is absolute and into which ‘things’ (or the five aggregates) are organized, which organization then influences how they appear, i.e. as either belonging to oneself (to one’s body) or to the environment.

[M. 106]

6 June 2012

Perhaps I am able to understand you better now: If, for a moment, we call experience 'input' and activity 'output', we can say that they are inseparable from each other in that one side can only be understood in relation to the other. They are a compound. The input determines the output, and the output determines the input (to a certain degree). *To act just means to change the input* (within the limits of one's capabilities). By moving I change my experience, and the changed experience is then the basis for further movements etc. *A closed feedback loop*. So whatever is experienced can only be understood in relation to possible activities. *Therefore experience is always influence*. How things appear (i.e. their 'name') is basically their way of exercising influence on one, i.e. it is their way to 'make one act'. And any activity can only be understood in relation to experience in that it is just a change or modification of the experience.

With regard to the senses this would mean that they are the 'channels' through which the input or influences 'come'—*including* all receptors that are only concerned with occurrences within one's body.

But since the Buddha only mentioned six senses, the sense of touch must (for him) include more than what is usually understood as 'touch', otherwise I see no way to avoid the conclusions which I drew in my last letter. In other words: *Whatever event* is not visible, audible, smellable and tastable (including their imaginary counterparts) must be subsumed under the sense of touch. Is this correct? What about bodily pain for example? Is this the 'unpleasantness' of an object of the sense of touch?

[M. 107]

10 June 2012

I cannot remember my birth nor can I foresee my death. So it *seems* that I have to rely solely on the reports and observations of others, and then apply what I have heard and observed *externally* to myself. But this would never be satisfying, since I *could* be the only exception. Even if I *would* be able to *remember* my birth and foresee my death, I could never be absolutely sure that I'm not the victim of some kind of delusion.

But without being sure of birth and death *with regard to myself*, the teachings of the Buddha can never actually apply, because with regard to my very self, there is *no impermanence without birth and death*. I might acquire and lose things and people *within* my life, but this is *not as grave* as birth and death *of my own*.

I saw an article of a Buddhist writer on the net who wrote with regard to *sati* that it means 'remembrance' instead of 'paying attention' (I would agree here), but this led him to the conclusion that we cannot see death by 'paying attention' to our living bodies but only by 'remembering' that other bodies have died and then apply this knowledge to ourselves. In other words: He in fact *denied* that one can know *without inference to external sources* that one has to die (see my first paragraph).

To me this shows that this man was not a *sotāpanna* when he wrote this. Perhaps my expectations are too high, but *if I cannot know that I am born and that I am going to die without reference to external sources, then I cannot know what impermanence is with regard to myself, which means that I cannot see the suffering and not-self of myself*. It's that simple! Because what makes *me* impermanent are birth and death and nothing else!

At the beginning I wrote that it *seems* that one has to rely on external sources in order to 'know' that one is born and has to die (including memory). I said 'seems' because this assumption is a mistake. Because there is one thing *in the present* which is linked to birth and death in a way which escapes logic and science, and this is *being*. If one has understood being, one has understood birth and death.

It is hard for me to describe this properly, but I can somehow experience myself as 'being born' and 'being subject to death' without referring to something external. (By the way, I don't want to say that I have 'attained' something.) But this *sense of insecurity*, which underlies all my experience from childhood on, tells me this. Being is something unnecessary, a 'surplusness', a 'coming in addition', and this has everything to do with birth and death, because the only way to 'come in addition' is birth and the only 'outcome' or 'price' of such a pointless existence is death. I am not grounded or justified by means of some necessity or logic and therefore death is possible all the time, i.e. it is just a matter of time. This is the impermanence of myself. That's why I live in fear all the time. And that's why I cannot rest without solving this problem. It is strange:

Whenever I deviate *too far* from ‘solving the problem’, I feel bad and have to correct myself. Sometimes it’s going back and forth like a pendulum, but it’s never a matter of *abandoning* the ‘path’ in favour of the world. I’m just too lazy to do something apart from upholding the precepts and pondering. But the older I get, the more urgent the task becomes. I don’t have to force myself. It forces me. But this is a digression here.

I hope I can make myself clear. I would like to know what the difference is between my understanding of impermanence, especially the impermanence of myself, and the opening of the Dhamma Eye that “whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing.” I still don’t want to talk about ‘attainments’.

With regard to the topic of the senses, my understanding of ‘being’ implies a certain understanding of the senses (which I already tried to lay out), but this seems to differ from yours and the Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s.

I came to the conclusion that there are *no things apart from a possible interaction with the body*, i.e. the latter defines a thing as a thing. Forms (as in 'eye and forms') are therefore basically *tangibles at a distance*. I'm sorry that I have to bring up the matter of the 'experience confined to one eye alone' again, but it becomes more and more clear to me that this is just impossible—not just practically but even theoretically. For example: I cannot see a car without 'having a body', because what a car is depends on its usage and without the interaction with a body there is no 'usage'. So an eye alone could not recognize things as tools. But it could not even see lumps of coloured (and otherwise meaningless) matter, since what (external) matter, i.e. 'earth', 'water', 'air' and 'fire' are, is *not defined by their colour but by contact with a body*, otherwise no resistance could be manifest and therefore no 'solid', 'liquid', etc. So apart from the sense of touch, the other four senses give us only *secondary qualities of what can be touched*, i.e. they add colour, sound, smell and taste to *what is or can come in touch with the body*. It is therefore wrong to regard *the eye* as an organ of touch. The organ of touch is always *the body*, i.e. that which makes interaction possible. It is because of this that we can't see our eyes seeing, but that we *must* be co-aware of our body in order to see things, i.e. tangibles. *We can only see tangibles at a distance because we have a body that can, or at least could, reach out to them*. It is similar with the other senses: Strictly speaking, we don't hear sound but hear matter *through* sound, which means that we are co-aware of our body when hearing (otherwise we would never know what matter is, i.e. what solidity, liquidity, etc. are). Smell is a secondary quality of the air we touch when breathing; and taste always belongs to the food we touch in our mouths or the tangible parts of our oral cavity itself.

So the body as means of interaction must be present (however peripheral) whenever *things* are experienced, because a thing cannot be defined as *material* without contact with a body and it also cannot be defined as a *tool* without interaction with a body.

Because of this it cannot be right to regard the senses and with them one's whole body like disembodied subjects which are absent in the respective experience. That because of which there is contact and usage

and therefore 'thingness' of things cannot be absent, it cannot be inapparent. The eye in 'eye and forms' might be unseen, the ear in 'ear and sounds' might be unheard, etc., but no experience of visible things, audible things, etc. can be without any reference to the body which is and must therefore be part of any experience concerning things.

No-one seems to address this issue with regard to an understanding of the All. I regard this as a mistake. Perhaps you can relate to this?

[M. 109]

13 June 2012

I would like to illustrate further what I mean, especially with regard to the All. We can discern:

- 1) *external* matter or the 'environment' which is given as
visible,
audible,
smellable,
tastable,
tangible
(including imagination) and
- 2) *internal* matter or the 'body' which is given or 'revealed' as
hungry,
thirsty,
feverish,
chilly,
itchy,
painful, etc.

If we deny that this kind of internal matter, i.e. one's body and the way it is given, belongs to the *senses-part* of the All, we are forced to subsume it under the *sense-objects-part*, namely under *the tangibles* and this is *not acceptable* to me, because it not only destroys the pairwise symmetry of the All but also contradicts what people understand by the 'five senses', especially the sense of touch, which is about *contact of one's body with the environment and not at all about how the body itself is given*.

Perhaps you can explain, 'where' in the All one's always 'humming' body is 'located', i.e. on which side of the All hunger, thirst, itching, etc. take

place—and also why my views are wrong. I try to describe things as close to my experience as possible and yet you seem to disagree.

PS: I know you allowed me to write as often as I want, but I can only hope this is not too much.

[M. 110]

15 June 2012

I think I have found the answer, but please don't hesitate to reply to my other letters if you feel that this would be beneficial.

My crude understanding of *anattā* led me to a different view. If I 'allow things to be as they are', I notice two things:

- 1) I experience *things* and *not experiences*;
- 2) no 'act of creation' is involved on my part.

Or condensed into *one* statement: Experience is an *encounter* (2) with *externals* (1).

As far as I can see, it was my *denial* of the 'I' of the first-person perspective which made it impossible for me *to treat all things as external—including the 'I' itself*. Because in order to encounter things, the 'I' must be *of the same nature*, i.e. it must be material or resistant. In other words: the 'I' must be '*encounterable*' too, it must be *a thing amongst things*, it must be *as external as all the things it encounters*. Therefore the 'I' of the first-person perspective can and *must be describable in external terms as 'the senses'* which meet their corresponding objects. So the teaching of *anattā* does *not* deny the 'I' of the first-person perspective but the *mineness* of that 'I'. The 'I' of the first-person perspective or the senses *as senses* can only be described as *that because of which there are externals or perspectivity*. Its 'mode of being' is *isolation* (granting its 'freedom', but also its suffering and its possible liberation from suffering). Between the 'I' of the first-person perspective or the senses *as senses* and the 'external world' lies an *unbridgeable gap*. Therein lies both the tragedy of desire and aversion and also the chance of liberation (being 'untouchable'), but that shall not be the topic of this letter. The point is that I can now solve the riddle of the experience confined to only one eye: In that case the *gap* would be there, i.e. forms would appear as 'being on the other side', as external to something isolated, 'because of which' this can be. But since that eye would be

disconnected from other senses (including mind), *distances would be indefinable. One would be unable to 'look at' things in relation to a body.* This is certainly unimaginable, but it can be stated.

What you said in the past makes more sense now. I always had a certain 'good feeling' about it, but the above-mentioned denial made it impossible to 'let it be'. I'm still very much interested in an answer regarding the sense of touch etc. (see past letters).

[M. 111]

15 June 2012

It is ridiculous, but I see it different again. But now I'll wait for your answer. If I would keep going, you'll never have the opportunity to reply.

[N. 70]

15 June 2012

I will reply in more detail to this and your previous letter, but since your mind is swinging from one pole to the other (which is not unusual), I thought of telling you to continue thinking along the lines from the letter below.

"There are senses, there is the world, there is the—unbridgeable gap. None of it is yours. There is here, there is yonder, there is there, and—again, none of it is yours..."

[N. 71]

16 June 2012

Here is the reply I composed two days ago (before I received your letter of 15th of June, to which I will also reply later on).

No-one denies the internal matter you described. The experiences you refer to (hunger, thirst and so on), can all be said to *endure*—having a body means enduring. What I'm trying to point out is that this enduring sense of one's body you mentioned, is *not fundamental*, structurally speaking.

Hunger for example pertains to this body here, 'my body', as opposed to someone else's externally that I can see. But as I pointed out earlier (in my letter from the 7th of May), when the present experience as a whole is

considered, there is no eye independent of the forms—eye-and-forms is your visual experience as a whole. The same applies to all the other senses. The result of this is your ability to discern your body ‘here’ as a separate object from all the other objects you find ‘yonder’. However, although the ‘body here’ is founded upon the matter which is fundamental in your experience, the actual phenomenon of that body you are experiencing is, again, not fundamental. It is a complex *product* which arose from the superposition of the senses, from your reflexion, from your engagement with the environment. Furthermore it is an *appropriated* product, which you can only abandon by seeing it as dependent upon something equally material, yet clearly impermanent and not yours. What would that be? Your sense-bases, your eye that doesn’t appear, but you *know* is ‘there’, your ear that doesn’t appear, but you *know* is ‘there’... and so on.

This is why I see your views as wrong. No matter how accurate you try to describe things, they still appear as they are coming out of your inability to see your body as not-yours. This is why I think that the experience of “my body” takes a central role for you, and appears as something more fundamental than the environment and/or your senses.

Hunger means that you have a body. And body is just a heap of matter (solid, watery, airy and fiery). Some parts of that heap have the ability to see, hear, taste, etc. However it is because of those parts, it is because of the world they reveal to you that you are able to distinguish body as a heap of matter. If there were no senses whatsoever you would not be able to see and know any of your organs, which simply means without senses there would be no body. Your stomach is painful when it’s empty, this is what we call hunger. But you would not be able to locate that stomach, or even know it as one, if your senses and your reflexion hadn’t already provided you with the notion of space or extension, internal and external, etc. That’s why I say ‘my body’ is secondary. I mean that in a structural, not temporal sense. You can argue that my thought of a ‘stomach’ is based on the external observation (watched programmes, observed in animals or other people, etc.), and indeed for a non-educated individual hunger will not be seen in terms of a stomach, he will simply feel its pain, but the point is that he will still feel it *here*, *below* my head, and *above* my legs and

so on. He will look for things yonder to swallow, so the pain would disappear.

[M. 112]

20 June 2012

I finally managed to bring a little more order into my confusing experience. It seems that my problem was that I regarded myself as an individual *without inner structure*. But as far as I can see now, an individual is a *compound* made of the six senses. Each of them is from *his* point of view 'here' or 'at the center'. But since the senses are different 'heaps of matter', *they cannot occupy the same space*; and they are also *of different size or volume* (the ear cannot be where the eye is, the body is bigger than the eye, etc.). So the individual is not *one* center but a compound of *six* centers. In other words: One can regard an individual as a compound of six subordinated individuals.

For example: If one would consist only of the body-sense, one would have no inner structure, i.e. one would not experience one's feet as 'further down' than one's head, *because no other senses would be embedded in the head*, e.g. no eyes from where parts of the body would appear 'further away' than others.

I think as long as one refuses to *see oneself as a compound of many*, the experience must appear 'muddled'. If one tries to understand how 'I' can be *at the same time* 'in the head' seeing forms but also 'down there' touching things or feel hunger, etc., one must fail, since there can be no agreement between the 'I', if understood as *the one and only subject* (which cannot have any internal structure), and those *different points of view offered by the actual experience*.

Do you agree?

[N. 72]

20 June 2012

I do agree. Seeing your Self as depending on something plural means seeing it as not-self, since the main characteristic of one's Self is the sense of uniqueness, a single master which takes charge of all. The same principle applies to seeing consciousness as plural (six classes, for each sense), because with the knowledge that different consciousnesses are present at the same time, it is impossible to regard them all as 'mine', and when one of them cannot be mine, neither can the rest. Plurality takes the Self's mastery over the experience away—an individual then slowly replaces a person.

[M. 113]

21 June 2012

After my 'little breakthrough' yesterday, a new kind of problem did arise, therefore I would like to ask you some additional questions:

1) There are 'forms' within one's visual field, which are definitely not located in front of one's physical eyes nor within them, instead one sees them because something happens within the brain. I'm *not* talking about *imaginary* forms but about things like blotches, patterns and flashes, which one might see in a case of migraine, epilepsy, etc. but also without such diseases. The question is: Do these 'forms' technically belong to the pair of 'eye and forms'?

2) Is the 'I' in 'I see forms' the *eye* or the *mind* (*mano*), which sees *through* the eye?

The background of the question: I am separated from the forms that I see by a distance. This distance can be quite undefined, but it is there nevertheless. So forms are *in front of me* at a distance. While this distance is *transparent* it is *also* 'massive' or 'solid'. In the end, this distance is my *gaze* ('Blick' in German, not sure if 'gaze' is actually the best translation, but I mean what Sartre is talking about). My gaze cannot penetrate forms, which means that it is *material*. Because of this solidness of one's gaze, I'm inclined to regard the gaze as *one's eye*. But I think that at this point, '*mano*' or 'mind' comes into play as the 'source' or '*internal end*' of one's gaze, which cannot be further objectified. Since *mano* is said to 'unify' and

‘coordinate’ the other senses, it makes sense to me to understand ‘seeing’ in this way.

But the crucial point for me with regard to this is that it seems to be the only way to avoid otherwise ‘unexplainable situations’. For example: If we regard the *eye* (and not *mano*) as the source of one’s gaze, i.e. if we regard the *eye* as the internal end of the perspective, we are forced to accept that whatever is (non-imaginary) seen, must be in front of one’s eyes at a certain distance. But such a view is incompatible with the ‘facts’. We cannot find ‘migraine flashes’ in front of the eyes nor within them, and science tells us that we cannot see before nerve-impulses (and not light) coming from the retina have actually reached the brain.

It seems to me that the ‘existentialist assumption’ of being in the world is based on the *error of putting the eye in the center, but actually the eye is ‘in-between’*. The eye does not see, instead ‘one’ sees *through* the eye, i.e. through a *transparent but nevertheless solid distance*.

I would like to know what you think about that and how you would answer these questions.

[N. 73]

9 July 2012

Here are my replies to your last couple of letters. If there are some questions that I didn’t address but you would like me to do so, please let me know. I wasn’t sure which of them you have answered yourself.

Reply to the letter 15th June:

You wrote: “the ‘I’ must be ‘encounterable’ too, it must be a thing amongst things, it must be as external as all the things it encounters.” Correct. ‘Self’ is a particular phenomenon that arises when you regard things as ‘mine’.

You wrote: “So the teaching of *anattā* does not deny the ‘I’ of the first-person perspective but the mineness of that ‘I’.” Correct again. People think that *anattā* means there is no self, i.e. that (thing) which is Self disappears; this is a mistake, the ‘selfness’, the appropriation of that disappears but not the thing itself. To see this it is absolutely necessary to first see the Self as a phenomenon, as a thing.

Regarding “*unbridgeable gap*”: When the ‘gap’ is not seen, it exercises a certain type of ‘pressure’ on an individual, a pressure which asks for recognition (cf. Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s letters) as Self. Thus, when there is *avijjā*, a simple lack of knowledge in regard to the gap (i.e. relationship), there is Self.

Reply to the letter of 21 June 2012:

You asked: “The question is: Do these ‘forms’ technically belong to the pair of ‘eye and forms’?” Unless they are imaginary, then yes. ‘Eye’ is not just a ball made of flesh in your skull, it is also comprised of an optic nerve, its counterparts in the brain and so on. Vision is a result of these components—they are all ‘the eye’.

You asked: “Is the ‘I’ in ‘I see forms’ the eye or the mind (*mano*), which sees through the eye?” It’s sometimes one, sometimes other, and sometimes both.

The distance is perceived, which means that with seeing we reveal distances. One’s eye is the counterpart of forms, but both of them, by being material, are a counterpart of mind (and the same goes for all the senses). The eye is not in-between, since that would mean that you are still regarding your mind as a centre of your experience (i.e. Self), which discovers forms in the world, through vision, out there, which leaves that which is ‘here’ (my eyes) as something in between the two.

One’s eyes are the source of one’s gaze, if by gaze we agree simple non-specified seeing (there is however always some degree of intentional involvement). You don’t have to think that whatever is seen has to be *in front of one’s eyes*, since ‘front’, ‘behind’, up or down, are all spatial distinctions which means they are not as fundamental. Things that are seen, and are not imaginary, should simply be regarded as a result of *having eyes* (eye balls, nerves, muscles, etc.) The eye doesn’t end where the retina starts, it goes further and includes things that we generally don’t see (and consequently don’t regard as being part of it). Having migraine flashes or ‘blind light spots’ (which I do on a regular basis) means having eyes, having optic nerves, etc. I think that whatever science has to say on this topic will be flawed because of the implicit assumption that ‘sight’ is only ‘in front’ of one’s eyes. Yes, one’s retina is that which is sensitive to light, but what if the optic nerve possesses some different type of

sensitivity—other kinds of stimuli like pressure, particular chemicals, etc. which would result in appearance of flashing lights or similar? Science tells us that we cannot see before the nerve impulses from retina have reached the brain, but what about nerve impulses that originate from different areas of the eye, they might offer some other ‘type’ of seeing (different than we are accustomed to, hence not regarded as such). This would not only satisfy the curiosity in regard to migraines and similar occurrences, but would also explain how drugs and chemical substances can actually change the way one perceive things in one’s environment. Without going into too much irrelevant details, this is just to show you that there is a solid ground for doubting what science and a common man think by ‘eye’, ‘seeing’ or ‘senses’ in general.

You wrote: “It seems to me that the ‘existentialist assumption’ of being in the world is based on the error of putting the eye in the center, but actually the eye is ‘in-between’. The eye does not see, instead ‘one’ sees through the eye, i.e. through a transparent but nevertheless solid distance.” It’s true, the eye is not in the center, but it’s not in between either. It is here, as opposed to yonder, but both are there.

[M. 114]

9 July 2012

You say: “One’s eye is the counterpart of forms, but both of them, by being material, are a counterpart of mind (and the same goes for all the senses.) The eye is not in-between, since that would mean that you are still regarding your mind as a centre of your experience (i.e. Self), which discovers forms in the world, through vision, out there which leaves that which is ‘here’ (my eyes) as something in between the two.” If I understand this correctly, there is a difference between ‘here’ and ‘centre’, but how can ‘here’ be ‘here’ without being ‘central’?

I have noticed that my body is certainly *closer* than other things, but closer and even closest is still not ‘here’. Nevertheless it seems that there is a centre, which (body-wise) is within one’s head. It seems to be the centre and origin of space, i.e. it seems that space opens up from there. But at the same time it is not ‘mixed’ with whatever is around it, i.e. there is that ‘gap’, which I already mentioned (even with regard to one’s body).

‘Paying attention’ or ‘observation’ is like a *bridge* over that gap, like a ‘going out’ in order to be with externals, to touch them. But the centre itself is like a blind spot. But what is this centre? Within the terminology of the Buddha, what is it? Is it the ‘mind’ (sense), the ‘heart’ or ‘consciousness’ or...? It seems to me that it is regarded as the ‘safe haven’ by many so called ‘mystics’ (including some Thai Ajahns), because of its interior characteristic.

To be honest, I also would like to keep it simple. I also would like to hear that there is a safe interior haven and that one has just to uproot the tendency to ‘flow out’ and cling to externals. Because I’m tired of ‘trying to understand’ and can easily relate to such a simple practice. But somehow it seems to me that this would be *too easy*, since it would degrade the Buddha to a mystic: “Retreat to the internal core and stay there forever”—too easy. I don’t mean that it is easy to *do* but (relatively) easy to come up with this kind of idea.

[M. 115]

17 July 2012

I’m not sure how to start. It seems to me now that it is impossible to ‘get rid’ of certain things. Instead of ‘things’ I should perhaps say ‘elements’. They appear to me as *unavoidable*. I formerly thought that one can somehow ‘destroy’ everything and is then left with nothing, but as I see now, even *nothing* is still ‘something’. The true ‘nothingness’ is like a bottomless abyss, empty and hollow, without any support—but this very abyss is immediately ‘filled up’ with ‘substance’. It’s like an invitation for ‘substance’ to creep in.

My point is that even in the case of ‘no senses’ or ‘unconsciousness’ (in the sense of ‘no orientation’), one cannot get rid of those ‘elements’. Even the utmost blank cannot remain unfilled. People call it ‘nothingness’, but it is still ‘massive’, i.e. *not* without substance. Does this make any sense to you?

There is no way to destroy these ‘elements’. *On the one hand* there is this abyss or nothingness, empty, hollow, without any support. One cannot *be* this. It’s *beyond reach*. It’s not a subject nor subjective. There is no way to grasp it or get hold of it. *On the other hand* there is this ‘substance’ or

‘filler’, which is always ‘massive’ or ‘positive’—or perhaps I should say that it is ‘intrusive’ (in the sense that the abyss is its ‘home’). One also cannot be *this*. It’s *also beyond reach*, i.e. one cannot ‘merge’ or ‘mix’ with it. So while this ‘abyss’ and its ‘filling’ can be distinguished, they cannot be separated. But it is important to understand that they do also not mix or merge with each other—*they don’t touch*. And yet *they are not separated by a spatial gap*.

These ‘things’ seem to be absolute, i.e. they seem to be ‘antecedent’. One cannot avoid them. No kind of extinguishment can remove them. One can only see that one can neither be the ‘abyss’ nor the ‘substance’, nor anywhere in-between. One can leave them alone. One can remain ‘untouched’ by them—but even this ‘remaining untouched’ is possible only *because of them* (the abyss, which cannot be reached).

I hope you can understand what I mean. If so, I would like to ask where to place the senses within this context? Or, if you disagree, I would like to know why.

[M. 116]

22 July 2012

I no longer regard my last two letters as so important (but if you want to reply, please feel free to do so). I had an insight just a few hours ago, which needs much more investigation, but even this little bit has changed quite a lot. It might sound trivial at first, but I have noticed that I can touch my arm by blowing at it. I don’t want to say that I touch the *air* with my *arm*, but that the *air* can serve as medium to make the arm tangible. I do not yet fully understand all the implications of that, but it certainly shredded my understanding of the senses and how they function totally. If my eyes were air blowers, I could touch/‘see’ my body with them... And indeed, there are similarities to one’s gaze... But at this point, I cannot say much more (too much confusion and excitation). But if you can—I would be happy to hear it.

[N. 74]

23 July 2012

Although I do think that I know what you are trying to say, still, could you please say something more about this recent experience (when you feel like it), and I might be able to add something in return.

[M. 117]

23 July 2012

In order to illustrate what I mean it would perhaps be good to imagine oneself naked in a completely dark room. And instead of blowing the air out through one's mouth, it would be better to imagine a small but strong fan in front of one's face, which is able to emit a permanent, strong and directed air jet in one's *looking direction*.

The point is that, in this dark room, the only thing which one would be able to *detect* by 'emitting' that air jet out of one's 'head', would be one's own body. If one would direct one's 'airy gaze' away from one's body, nothing happens, but when one directs it at one's body, the body 'emerges' (due to varying perceptions of coolness and pressure).

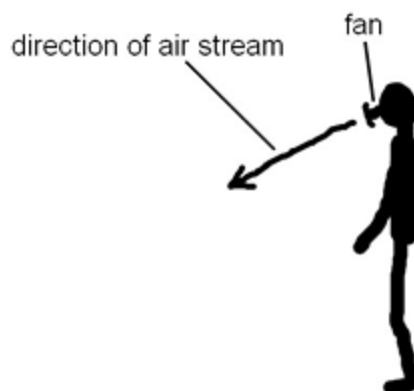
Now the most interesting thing is that one's blown-at body emerges as something *external*, i.e. one becomes aware of the *shape* of one's body *as if* using one's eyes or hands but *without* directly using them (or any other 'living' body part).

In other words: Usually one thinks that one can perceive an air stream with one's body but *not* one's body with an externally applied air stream, i.e. with an 'inorganic' thing directed at one's body. But this belief is wrong as this experiment shows.

In both cases (also important) the experienced thing is *external*, i.e. whether I perceive the air with my body or my body with the air, in each case the perceived thing is something external. This is not compatible with the view that the perception of something external depends on an internal subject. An air stream is not a subject, but it is nevertheless able to reveal the *shape* of one's body, i.e. to reveal the body as something 'out there'.

In normal life the source of moving air is *not* attached to my body and usually also not applied to a small area, instead the body is surrounded by

air or contacted by air from a direction perpendicular to my body's surface. This also makes my body appear as something external from the 'point of view' of the *air* (as in the case of the experiment), but since one also uses one's body as a medium to perceive the air, the air is *also* perceived as external (as 'incoming'), so we have the perception of *two* externals, one (air) enclosing the other (body). And the *enclosed* external (one's body) could be called 'internal'—but *only* because of the *enclosure* and *not* for being 'subjective'. If, by any means, my body could encapsulate all existing air with its skin and had nothing behind itself to touch its back, the relations would be reversed, i.e. the air would be 'internal' (encapsulated). Just to be sure of being correctly understood, I have drawn what I mean:



I hope it is more clear now what I mean. If you think that I am mistaken, please correct me.

[M. 118]

24 July 2012

I think I can explain that experience/experiment. I used the air stream like a blind man uses his stick, i.e. I used it as an extension of my body. Therefore I was mistaken when I said that the only thing which one can detect by such a stream of air is one's own body. If the air stream is strong and hard enough, one can even touch a wall with it, because the collision of stream and wall is transferred to one's body (like in the case of a stick).

To see this, helped me to understand how the eye sees *distant* forms: It uses light as its 'stick'. If I were able to carry around a 300,000 km long stick, I would be able to touch the moon 'at a distance', i.e. I would be able

to *see* the moon via the *sense of touch* (without using colour). I regard it as very important to see this clearly, because otherwise one will think of the eye as something entirely different than the sense of touch. This also happened to me. It seemed to me that ‘something’ *goes out* through the eye and touches the things at distance. But this is not true. Instead there is *light* between the eye and distant forms, which serves as a ‘stick’ or extension of the eye—but this light does *not* come out from within oneself.

Please don’t hesitate to make further comments if you think that this could be beneficial.

[M. 119]

24 July 2012

I made an error in my explanation: While one can use an air-stream similar to a blind man’s stick, the *original point* of the experiment was that one can become aware of the *shape* of one’s body by an external medium like air, which makes the bodily contours ‘appear’ by colliding with the body (whether applied intentionally, like in the experiment, or unintentionally).

Sorry for the confusion. Nevertheless there seems to be more than one aspect to such an experiment.

[M. 120]

25 July 2012

It seems to me that one has to 'turn the inside out', reversing the world. The eye does not see. It is a piece of sensorial matter which 'lights up' (appears) when hit by something. It's the sensorial matter (the 'senses') which appear and not the other way round. Nothing appears to the senses. *They* appear when hit. They appear into that direction from which they are hit, i.e. they appear towards their trigger, so to speak. If I blow air at my arm, its surface appears into the direction of the incoming air-stream—that is clearly shown by the aforementioned experiment. Instead of a fan at one's face one can also use a source of thermal radiation. If one looks at one's body with that 'thermal radiation eye', the body appears as an *external* mass, sensitive to heat. The very 'heat' is the body's appearance. When I say 'sensitive to heat', I don't mean that the body can sense the heat as a subject, because the body is that which is *external* here.

Since the experience is a superimposition of six senses, the above-mentioned situation cannot be easily seen. When people say 'I see', they confuse themselves *either* with something tangible/imagined while seeing, *or* they confuse themselves with the incoming trigger that hits the eye, which then (in turn) appears *towards* that trigger (which remains unseen).

From this point of view it is wrong to say that, in visual experience, the eye is unseen. Because it is the *eye* which appears as the world when hit. Only if we regard 'eye' as something visible, tangible, imaginable it would be right to say that this 'thing' cannot be found in visual experience (i.e. we must know what is not to be found in order to say that it is absent).

Still pondering...

[N. 75]

25 July 2012

Correct. The senses are defined by the world. You wrote: "From this point of view it is wrong to say that, in visual experience, the eye is unseen. Because it is the *eye* which appears as the world when hit. Only if we regard 'eye' as something visible, tangible, imaginable it would be right to say that this 'thing' cannot be found in visual experience (i.e. we must know what is not to be found in order to say that it is absent)."

Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that the extent of the world is the extent of the eye (cf. my Bāhiya translation I sent you some time ago), which roughly put means that your eye (and other senses) is your world. No because, when it is said that “the eye is unseen” it means that, if there would be no reflexion (reflexive eye, an idea, an image), you wouldn’t be able to distinguish the extent of the eye from the extent of the objects, it would be a simple experience and you wouldn’t be able to *name* it as either ‘eye’ or ‘objects’ (thus the ‘eye would not appear’)—it would simply be *there* (which means that *here* and *yonder*, although simultaneous with *there*, come second as a result of the reflexion). But anyway, yes—the eye and other senses are defined by the objects which it seems you see clearly now as not yours, which consequently means that neither of your senses can belong to you. They will exist as long as they are defined or ‘hit’ as you said. Once that ‘aggression’ on them disappears they cannot remain standing on their own.

I will of course reply to your previous letters too, this is just to encourage your current line of thought...

[M. 121]

27 July 2012

It seems to me that one’s perception of bodily warmth, or temperature in general, differs fundamentally from any other type of perception. Let me explain what I mean:

If I imagine my body to be *without any temperature* (not warm, not cold, nothing in-between), then all that is left of my body would be *surfaces* and *empty distances*. If I would touch a wall with my outstretched arm, that arm would be a *mere distance*, similar to a mobility cane, but it would no longer be ‘full’, because this sense of fullness is (as far as I see) *unthinkable* without temperature. I might *see* my arm, but seeing does not give me the impression of a ‘living arm’.

Isn’t it quite remarkable that temperature cannot be perceived as surface of an external thing? It’s always diffuse and filling. The temperature of external things must be *transferred* (in)to one’s body in order to be conceivable at all. One’s body is the *only thing in the world* that is ‘warm’. It’s *the only thing* that has a volume which does not hide behind a

surface. That kind of ‘voluminosity’ is only possible because there is something like warmth. It’s certainly no coincidence that warmth and being-alive and closeness are affiliated with each other.

Now, I can’t help but thinking that *this* is meant in MN 43, where the Ven. Sāriputta says that the five sense-faculties depend on vitality and *heat*. Because ‘I’ would not ‘be’ without that sense of *fullness*, which is given by the warmth that pervades the whole body (except ‘dead things’ like hair, nails, etc.).

So ‘heat’ might not be an *object* of the sense of *touch*, but actually the *basis* for *all* the senses to function. A corpse produces no warmth. And whenever people try to imagine to be another person or even a thing like a stone, they can’t do so without ‘filling’ that other thing. And the only thing that ‘fills’ is ‘warmth’ or temperature in general. It gives one a sense of voluminosity that is *not surface-related*.

Perhaps you can also comment on this?

PS: I can’t remember having received any Bāhiya translation from you. I can only remember that we talked about Bāhiya a long time ago and that you sent me (not so long ago) a translation of (a part of) MN 28.

[M. 122]

31 July 2012

I think the penny (almost) dropped. My understanding of the senses has now changed fundamentally. But I’m not sure whether I can make myself clear. I also have to add that I came to that understanding at least partly because of my ‘hallucinations’, so it might be that my understanding sounds like that of a mentally-ill person, but to me that doesn’t matter very much. I have to work with what I got.

In a recent letter I spoke about an experiment where the blowing of air against one’s body makes the body ‘appear’ into the direction of the incoming air (I think there is no need to repeat this here). But I then extended that experiment and asked myself how it is possible that one can feel as being ‘under observation’. The answer is that this is only possible because of *others*, i.e. because of *external* senses directed at one. Without them one’s body would never appear as ‘someone’, i.e. as *being seen, heard, etc.*

But then came the realization that ‘my’ senses are not *my* senses at all, *that ‘I’ carry around ‘the others’ with ‘me’*. It is never possible to *be* in the position of the senses. The senses always perceive *from the outside* ‘as others’. This outside cannot be ‘occupied’ by me. So I *don’t* mean that ‘I’ perceive externals from ‘here’ or from ‘within’, because there is no such thing ‘from where’ ‘I’ could perceive. The eye does not see itself—*not* because it is *me* but because it is *not me*.

I am not sure whether I am able to make myself intelligible here. I don’t want to speak overly figuratively, but the six senses *are* ‘Māra and his hordes’. *They* have found one and *that* is what one feels as ‘oneself’.

It is like being in ‘Māra’s laboratory’, where a huge deceiving experiment took place and now the deceived one found out. I know this sounds like the talk of a psycho, but as I see it, all ‘mental illnesses’ which involve paranoia, etc. are quite true in their core, because one actually is under constant observation, but one has to realize that one’s ‘own’ senses are the spies and voyeurs. They are ever-present without one realizing it—and the pressure of them can become so big, that one literally perceives ‘others’, i.e. hearing voices, etc. In a sense, the *whole world* appears to be nothing but such a perception, but at this moment I cannot elaborate further on this.

Perhaps it is not necessary for you to answer all my former letters, but please decide for yourself. There is still a lot of work to do for me. But, as I see it, it’s not the work that ‘normal Buddhists’ expect. There is no way that ‘sitting’ or ‘watching the breath’ gives one these insights. Perhaps I am too harsh here, but these things are a waste of time unless one has a basis for them, which is understanding. You once said that there can be no right practice without right view. That’s what I mean.

In one of your letters you mentioned that you felt like those voices were ‘using’ your senses to communicate to you, which meant that those same senses couldn’t be further regarded as yours (or were certainly less so). If others are having the free access to something that is yours, if they can use it as and when they please, and if you cannot do anything about it, that thing is not truly yours. And the fact that you have seen this *plurality*—of users (as opposed to a singular master called ‘Self’), means a lot.

‘Others’, as a phenomenon, can be described as a framework through which you have the experience of other people. This framework is indeed there, ‘looking’ at you. The important thing is whether you have an experience of an actual living person, whether you imagine another person, or whether you experience voices that originate from others, thoughts or images of others or from others, either way, they all *have to* present themselves *through* that very ‘framework’. If the framework is understood and disowned, whatever comes through it will be the same, that goes without saying. Remember that Ven. Ñāṇavīra once wrote to Ven. Ñāṇamoli how the practice of loving kindness is seriously misunderstood, and notoriously difficult to perform correctly. They compared it to an intentional modification of one’s being-for-others which is that very framework. This intentional modification culminates in developing an utter equanimity in place of that framework, so that nothing whatsoever can move one’s mind any more. (On a slightly different note, you might notice that whenever there is an experience of *dukkha*, and I mean that in a real existential sense, it involves the *sense of others*. And in the case of objects, even for example when you see a person shouting at his bicycle from which he has just fallen, at that very moment he regards that bike as *another*. This is because *others* is like a counterpart of *me*, and both are equally regarded as Self. As a matter of fact a *puthujjana*’s sense-of-me, ‘merges’ into a sense-of-others when he engages in reflection, but this now is a completely different topic.)

The senses *operate* on their own, they see, they hear, they react. It is through appropriation of them that one appropriates all of those activities. Despite all of the appropriations the senses can never be possessed *directly*, they will always remain enclosed in their own domain,

and remain ‘outside’. It is around this ‘outside’ that one builds one’s sense of self and one’s assumptions, or in plain terms—one acquires this ‘outside’, makes it *mine*. Because of this the Buddha would describe the internal senses as ‘hollow and empty’, if you know what I mean.

Regarding the “Māra’s laboratory”: You can even go a step further and say that one’s most obvious immediate Self is that intruder who watches every move you make. One’s very Self is not one’s self, which an unstable *puthujjana* can experience as literally being ‘possessed by another person’. In reality this is not far from the truth, since one’s very Self belongs to the world more than it belongs to one, so yes indeed he, in its entirety, is another person living inside of him, figuratively speaking of course. On the other hand, one is not mad by a definition, one is mad by what types of action one commits. One is mad if one’s actions come from the undeveloped mind, if they originate from greed, aversion and delusion. In this way every normal person is actually mad—being a ‘normal’ person means being a *puthujjana*. I’m not saying that people with mental issues are more insightful than ‘normal’ people, but they do have access to the phenomena normal *puthujjanas* are actively refusing to acknowledge. That is because acknowledging them would bring the destruction of their ‘normal’ world.

Māra is very real, otherwise the Buddha wouldn’t have talked about him (and to him as a matter of fact). And there isn’t anything in this world that you can pick up, take, or go for refuge in, that doesn’t belong to him. (Certainly your senses and everything that you can experience through them, and mind *concerned* with the senses is also under his control.) So if you want to go beyond, and fully step out of his reach where he won’t be able to do with you what he wants, then you have to gradually overcome everything.

You wrote: “But as I see it, it’s not the work that ‘normal Buddhists’ expect...” It’s good to hear that from someone else, other than me...

Thank-you for your encouraging letter. Last night, while sleeping (!), I experienced something which I would describe as untying of the knot. It was as if my eye-faculty became isolated from the other faculties and then ceased. Everything left me for one moment, but it bounced back immediately. Right after that I had a very short dream, where I gave a teaching to my mother where I explained to her what happened, namely that 'one's' eye has no stand on its own.

While this was very profound, it was *not at all blissful*. When I noticed what was going to happen, I had the wish to prevent it. But I could not. It was as if all my accumulated effort culminated in that moment. I was 'drawn into it'. To be honest, I recoiled in horror from this bottomless abyss, where there is 'neither light nor darkness'. I also know why. It was mainly because of my sensual desire. I felt as if my life was over. I did not want it. Was I striving so hard to end up with nothing? That was my feeling. I needed some time to calm down.

I am still not happy with that. As I said: it was not blissful. It was disillusioning. Life has lost quite a bit of its 'colour'.

There is another thing: When I experienced this, I faced my strongest fear. But it seems to me as if this happened not for the first time. When I look back, it appears to me that my whole life was already under the power of this. I had always a kind of 'blocked access' to this experience or dimension. It prevented me from leading a normal life. I had always the feeling that I must 'finish' something, and this anxiety was and is like the pointer.

It seems that there is also another 'innerworldy' change. As I already said, people and things seem to 'speak' to me, as if another world shines through. And they seem to say that I am now in another position in the world. They seem to say that (if I would die now) I could go wherever I want, that I would be in a position 'to rule'. You must know that I am a very shy person, but it seems that I have somehow become a 'magnet' to 'female energies' from beyond. That is, in a way, tempting. I am not a strong-enough person to *immediately* reject such offers, because I never found sensual satisfaction in this life, and most human women are not beautiful enough to really tempt me, but I also know that such a kind of

life of (heavenly) sensual indulgence would and could never be the end for me. So I have *no inclination* to ‘wait for death’ to lead me there (apart from the possibility that this might just be Māra again, trying to deceive me).

Isn’t it remarkable that *nothing* of this happened ‘while sitting in the lotus posture’? You can sit in an armchair or even lie in bed and sleep—and yet it happens. There is no need to torture oneself with painful or exotic postures and techniques, at least not in an early stage. What is required is relentless effort (never giving up) and honesty—and of course the teachings as a guide (including the help of people like you). I also found it not wrong to ‘chill’ a bit after a big effort, even if it’s watching TV. This, of course, applies only to a layman with no ‘meditation skills’.

For the moment, I just wanted to let you know.

[M. 124]

2 August 2012

I now have to cry. Today is full moon. It seems they send help. My head is almost clear. One of my main voices seems to be gone. It’s like a cloud which has disappeared in my head. I almost forgot how it is without this fog. I looked out of the window where I saw a mother moving her ill-mannered child away—but then this child looked like this goblin and at that moment it happened...

[M. 125]

2 August 2012

Regarding my last mail: I think Māra was playing a trick on me (using my ‘Buddhist beliefs’). They faked the ‘help’. I think I must *completely ignore everything* which comes from beyond and has something to do with ‘me’ and ‘mine’. *Nothing* of this is reliable.

Even my ‘attainment’ was a prank. He deprived me of ‘him’ and ‘made’ that dream. That’s horrible, quite devastating to see. I have to totally stop any thinking in terms of what I ‘attained’ or not. Ignoring everything ‘from beyond’. Do you agree?

The Buddha said his teaching is good in the beginning, the middle and the end. What happened last night was not good at all. Good that I saw it—late but not too late.

When I noticed the prank, they said that they had not so much fun for a long time.

If you have advice, it would be very welcome. I feel very exhausted and was on the verge of losing my mind.

[N. 77]

2 August 2012

Whether your experience was Māra's prank or not, I cannot say, it's not easy to fully understand your personal descriptions, simply because they are very personal. What I can say is that your understanding of the Dhamma *did* change, since I can understand that. To what extent this change has occurred, it's too early to say—perhaps it's far enough, perhaps it isn't. But yes, take any insights and attainments with reserve. The reason why 'they' were having 'so much fun', was probably because you *really wanted* it to be an attainment, what 'they' are outlining (in a crude and aggressive manner) was your own *upādāna*. Don't try to make 'them' disappear, try to make your suffering in regard to them go away.

[M. 126]

2 August 2012

Whatever it was, I learned a lesson. All day long I had a kind of heaviness and tiredness in the body and felt somehow strange. I also could not clearly remember everything. When I saw the prank, that feeling left me. What I want to say: Such an 'attack' or 'possession' (if we want to call it that) can be discerned from the 'normal' state. And you are right: They play with one's wishes and desires.

Regarding my experience: It's best not to make 'something' out of it. Even when I described it for you, I made 'something' out of it, because I wanted it to be 'something'. Because of that, 'they' or 'I' also (almost) pranked you. I'm sorry for the confusion.

[N. 78]

2 August 2012

No need to apologize. As I said earlier on, your experience might not be to the extent that you have hoped for, but nevertheless your understanding now differs from what it used to be. It takes time for a mind to fully overcome the doubt, and that is achieved in the process of doubting (or letting your doubt arise).

[M. 127]

3 August 2012

Now (with a little more detachment and after a good night) I can say that that which happened on 1 August was definitely ‘something’, but as soon as I bring ‘myself’ or ‘externals’ into play, it becomes ‘more’ than it was.

It ‘feels’ in a certain way when one talks about things that one does not know for sure. Do I know that I received help from above? No. But I wanted to believe this. And this is like an invitation for Māra. One becomes ‘possessed’ because of such beliefs. And together with this, comes a certain ‘feeling’ and an altered perception of one’s body or oneself. I think that this can even feel good, but it’s still ‘possession’.

Even when I think that this very insight, which I have just outlined above, is ‘mine’, i.e. when I begin to be ‘proud’ of it, Māra comes in. And the result is a mix of ‘genuine’ and ‘fake’. And I think that if one cannot discern both, one throws the baby out with the bath water. I think the latter happened yesterday when I wrote that the ‘*whole thing*’ was Māra’s work. Nevertheless, I think that in such a case it’s better to throw *everything* away than keeping the delusion together with the truth, because the former is like a drop of ink in a cup of water: it’s enough to color the whole thing, which then (as a whole) is twisted.

It seems that the body is like a vessel for all the crap from beyond. After all my experiences I have to use the word ‘crap’ because it *is* crap. There is no point to sugarcoat this. I think a Buddha can directly see whether a vessel is empty or full, i.e. whether ‘someone’ is ‘in’ or not.

After all, the grip of ‘others’ on me *appears* to be less than before. I’m especially referring to the voices. They *seem* to be ‘farther away’. But whether *they* decided to retreat or *I* am less vulnerable—I don’t dare to

say, because I don't know. It seems that as soon as I think that it is because 'I' attained something, that strange and unpleasant feeling of possession returns. It seems perfectly possible that one can spend one's whole life 'possessed' and the more one believes the worse it is.

My understanding of 'this world' and 'that world' has also changed. My senses (*as senses*) are already 'beyond'. But 'this world' is also out of reach—it seems to be another 'part' of the 'beyond', i.e. it seems to originate from 'behind', like 'beyond watching beyond'.

I think my experience from the second-last night has something to do with mindfulness during sleep. I was somehow able to watch (and later describe) myself 'passing out'. It is like a 'disconnection'. Last night, I was able to 'catch myself' before this could happen. I was using the breath as an anchor. I might err, but it somehow seemed that the 'breath' held 'my world' together. *And how loud they were laughing from behind...*

I once thought that it must be possible to get *behind them* in order to be safe *from* them. If one would be in the position of Māra or behind him, one would be invisible to his eye. But being *in a position* means that one is somewhere and that means that one has *something beyond one*. So this cannot be the escape. In *jhāna* one is perhaps beyond Māra, but there is still something beyond *jhāna*—the next one. And the highest one is like being with one's back to the 'wall'—so still no escape. 'One' is always 'under observation'.

So I think the only escape is not an escape in the sense of 'going somewhere' and not even 'going nowhere' but no longer experiencing 'one' (neither going nor 'hiding' in some 'upper realm').

Even if 'everything' ceases, there is still 'something', namely (the fact) that everything is *gone*. But I think that even to this 'nothing' one must not 'stick'. Whatever remains, remains. But not as 'mine'. I have the impression that some Buddhists have personalized *nibbāna* or the Unborn. For example: if I read that "the *citta* never dies"—that might be the case, but to me this *citta* turns into something toxic if one regards it as Self. If one tries or wants to *rest* there, one is already trapped. As I said above: There is only 'crap'—even this *citta* (whatever this might be or not be) is crap and I don't want to touch it. Or better: I certainly would like to touch it because of its beauty or whatever, but I know that I shouldn't. And

while reading this, it sounds somehow ‘attained’ to me, but this can also become ‘sticky’, so better not touch it.

[M. 128]

3 August 2012

There is a certain amount of calm in my heart, but at the same time an excitement because of that calm. The calm is unusual for me, the calm is strange—and this makes me excited. I’m also less responsive to erotic stimulation via images (I tested it, perhaps not very wise but I was curious), but at the same time it feels as if this ‘should not be’. Or it’s just exhaustion. Also possible.

What I experienced in that night was the impermanence of ‘myself’, i.e. cessation. There was nothing left of ‘me’. This can never be blissful, but if this is not ‘it’, I don’t know what ‘it’ is.

I hope that I don’t annoy you with things like that, but I just visited the site of a monastery which I support. It contains photos of various monks, especially from the Thai Forest Tradition, like Ajahn Mun and Ajahn Chah. But now some (not all!) of them look back at me and smile. It is as if I have now something in common with them. It’s ‘just’ an experience, but it is quite strong. Similar with other images: I somehow can see Māra in images, especially those which are made to seduce.

[M. 129]

7 August 2012

I’m a bit reluctant to write to you (and to write at all), because I am not yet ‘finished’ with whatever happened to me. It’s still in process. But it is quite difficult to be alone with this, especially with the doubt.

From that day on (when ‘it’ happened), the calm became deeper and deeper, without me doing anything. I cannot ‘doubt it away’, but nevertheless I’m in doubt over it. This ‘calm’ is not ‘me’, if you know what I mean.

The piercing quality of the emotions is remarkably reduced. You know that I have a big problem with fear and anxiety. I don’t want to say that this is gone, but it is reduced to a degree, which is bearable—like after taking some heavy tranquilizers (but without taking them, of course).

This also applies to sexuality. I'm still a *man*, but it seems that I'm no longer an 'animal'. What aroused me very much is now unable to set me under heavy pressure. I don't mean that it has become repulsive, but quite 'lame'. There is a kind of feminine beauty that is without 'flesh'. One only wants to look, to listen and (at most) to softly hug—and this is *more than enough*. It is not 'hot', it does not 'burn'. (If this topic is not appropriate, I ask for your pardon.)

Whether this is 'true' or not, I have noticed that it is no longer so hard to have *mettā*. It seems to flow automatically. My field of sight also seems to have a 'golden touch'.

In a sense, I've become lazy. I don't want to be active or think very much. The calm within is there, I don't need to fabricate it by 'doing' something.

If possible, I would like to hear advice how to deal with this situation in general.

PS: I can hardly believe that *I* am writing this. It's not the Mathias I used to know. And this is somehow disturbing. I also don't have the impression that I am much more 'wise' than before. It's more that 'something' left me.

[M. 130]

11 August 2012

It seems that, with regard to my state of mind, I am almost 'back to normal' now, which is good. I can't tell you exactly at what stage of the path I am, but if this is still not 'path', then I don't know what 'path' is and I also don't want to know, because at some point it is enough. I'm tired of all the 'unfinished business'. Within the limits of my capabilities I've done what could be done. But what happened to me I have not done. It just happened. I cannot even say that it happened *because* of all the effort. Perhaps this is one reason for my doubt over it. But one thing I know: I will never fight again like that. It's enough.

I've thought about ordaining, because this life is quite pointless, but it seems to me that being a monk would be even more troublesome. One is the center of attention, especially in the West, which I don't want to be. I also don't want to give talks, nor do I want to partake in all this empty

ritualistic nonsense. So I will stay here until I *must* go forth. I don't see the point in forcing myself to do it. It somehow doesn't even matter.

PS: I don't feel 'enlightened' at all. And the more I think about it, the better it is. At best I could say that I'm stupid and I know it.

[N. 79]

12 August 2012

After the intense effort it is quite normal not to be able to fight again. Whether you achieved the security from bondage or not time will tell, you will just have to be patient, until the old habits which were the result of not-knowing the way out of suffering, disappear. I can tell you that in our latest correspondence your understanding has been furthered, there is no doubt about that. How far this has happened, you will have to wait to find out. Do you for example feel like not being able to suffer as much as before? By this I mean: you can suffer intensely but your mind has 'forgotten' how to get wound up about it. Regarding the doubt, it's not that it suddenly disappears, it's more like your mind cannot be affected by it while it is there. When you realize that, then it disappears.

If your present conditions are fine, in the sense that they are supportive towards the precepts and reflecting on the Dhamma, there is no reason for you to rush and ordain. And if you do decide so, it will be, as you are fully aware, very important to choose the place rightly. And yes, it doesn't really matter whether you are within the Saṅgha or at home, you are alone.

[M. 131]

12 August 2012

You ask: "Do you for example feel like not being able to suffer as much as before?" I would describe it like this: The 'readiness to respond' to all kinds of 'stimuli' is lowered. When (for example) fear arises, it is less able to get a hold of me. The ringing of the doorbell (for example) could easily startle me. But now there only seems to be an 'initial response', but right after that it is 'cut off'. Disturbances are less deep, less piercing.

There seemed to be a 'basic' or 'central tension', which is gone now. I would describe this as being in the area of the chest. It was the 'panic

button', so to speak.

A lot of fear and anxiety used to arise when I caught myself at the moment of 'falling asleep'. While this still gives me a very unpleasant feeling, I am somehow able to 'reverse directions' and to 'fall softly'. But this is very hard to describe.

Can you make sense of what I say?

[N. 80]

15 August 2012

Yes, I can see what you mean. It might well be that you found the way of not being pierced 'with the second arrow', once hit by the first. As I said before, just be patient and refrain from jumping to any conclusions, things will clear out.

Do you feel like your mind is always with you now? What about the desire to understand and think about the Dhamma?

[M. 132]

15 August 2012

Yes, you are right: It's best to refrain from jumping to any conclusions. I felt like a god for a few days. Quite strange. I'm happy that this is gone (which might sound even more strange). Nevertheless it seems that this night separates two lives of mine. But please don't understand this as 'hinting'. I cannot say that I am happy with that. It's more like: "What the hell was that?"

You ask: "Do you feel like your mind is always with you now?" I'm not quite sure what you mean. Do you mean mindfulness? If so, I cannot say that there is much of a difference to the time 'before'. But that doesn't mean that I was 'mindless' then. I can only say that things are less fascinating now. They lost 'colour'. I'm less absorbed. But I cannot say that I am now a better 'practitioner'. Please correct me in case I misunderstood the question.

You ask: "What about the desire to understand and think about the Dhamma?" That's not an easy question. I no longer have the feeling that my life depends on answering all those questions. I have the feeling that I could (not want to!) die now without 'getting lost'. I certainly care less

about these things. But the point is that I don't feel enlightened or awakened. So there is a desire to know what happened to me. It's not a piercing desire, but I want to know. If this really was 'something', how can it be that it is not clear? It is like waking up without a limb, but you really don't know how and why you lost it. Does this make any sense? I did not want that to happen. I actually wanted to stop it when I realized that it was going to happen. But there is also another thing: If this actually was 'something', how can it be that it happened while I was lying in bed, sleeping? My mind was somehow still pondering on the topic of the senses, even when 'asleep', but this is hardly a situation which comes to mind when thinking about 'attaining'. And after that I was not relieved, not filled with 'light' or 'bliss' but shocked and shaking, because there was nothing left of me, nothing which I could take with me, not the tiniest bit of myself. I actually thought: If this abyss is *nibbāna*, then I am not ready. And it seems to me that *this* was the insight which relieved me of a part of my sensuality, because the latter was too much of a burden.

[M. 133]

15 August 2012

In addition to my last answer, I would like to add another thing. While I don't know what actually happened to me, I can hardly imagine that this could happen while listening to the Buddha or while doing walking meditation (as with Ven. Ñāṇavīra), because one would collapse. It really was as if a knot became untied. The eye became isolated from the other senses and then 'disappeared'. For one moment, everything was gone. But I am helpless: I don't know how to describe this properly. I did not 'make' it happen. And if I say 'eye' or 'senses', I don't mean the organs. I don't know how to state it properly, but shouldn't I know this for sure if it was 'something'? Shouldn't I be able to explain this to you or at least to myself? If you have a round cake which is divided into six pieces and you then draw the pieces apart (by pulling them back), the 'cake' is gone, i.e. there is no more contact between the six pieces, no 'whole cake', because the pieces are isolated from each other. This is a very silly attempt to describe what I mean. It wasn't just a 'passing out', because I knew the reason for this 'passing out', namely that 'untying'. But it seems to me that this doesn't lie within the field of 'thinking', i.e. cannot 'figure it out'. But in and of itself, it was not obscure. I just cannot grasp it, cannot 'make sense' of it.

[N. 81]

15 August 2012

I wouldn't worry about a particular moment when 'it' might have happened. Despite Ven. Ñāṇavīra's description, it is more like a collection of many insights, the next one stronger than the last. Yes, things might culminate at the distinct point, but that depends on a person and amount of effort (intensity) present. Even in Ven. Ñāṇavīra's case, if you read the 'Early Letters' to Ven. Ñāṇamoli, you will see how some serious changes started occurring in his views, not long before the date he recorded as his stream-entry. Seeing oneself as one who has entered the stream might take much longer, but none of that really matters. What is important for that person is that the second arrow of *dukkha* cannot pierce him anymore.

[M. 134]

16 August 2012

I seem to have lost my religiousness. Even with regard to the 'Triple Gem'. The positive feelings I had towards Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha are gone. The books and all that, seem to be empty of value and meaning. This state doesn't seem to be in accordance to what is supposed to happen. I mean there are people who have some kind of 'spiritual experiences' and then become (more) 'religious' (than before), i.e. they are converted into (more serious) Christians or whatever *because* of their experiences. But in my case it seems to be the other way round. I'm done with religion, fed up with it. Even with Buddhism. A living Buddha or *arahat* would certainly impress me, because what I need now is a *hard hit in the face*, but not this dry food from the books, not stories from 2500 years ago. I cannot bow down to a myth, I cannot bow down to the past. It seems to me that there is no longer any external refuge, which does not mean that I am 'awakened' now. But I am 2500 years too late in order to bow down to the Buddha. Do you know what I mean? I cannot perceive him in a shoddy piece of metal, nor in the books. The books are like a corpse. This is not 'living wisdom'. He is not talking to me through the books. If at all, 'he' was somehow 'in me', in my character, and because of this I was able to proceed, even if I had never read any book about him in this life nor met any 'Buddhists'. I can no longer regard these external things or persons as refuge. Sorry.

[N. 82]

16 August 2012

Good, you have ceased to be a 'Buddhist'. The positive feelings towards Triple Gem that you had, were something you thought you had to have, and you had them in a way you thought was appropriate. On the other hand, the Suttas should become more alive now; they should become a direct and actual description of the nature of things, any other folklore flavour should disappear. Your faith, the way you know it, should also fade away...

Let me know how this is.

[M. 135]

16 August 2012

The problem with the Suttas *might* be their translation, but I'm not sure about that. Perhaps you can say whether there is an important difference between the 'original' and the translations. Ven. Ñāṇavīra seemed to be of the opinion that there is such a difference.

What you said about the feelings and faith makes sense. A distant object of veneration might be appropriate in the beginning (because there is a distance), but at some point one has to 'become' that 'object' by oneself, otherwise one can never change sides (this shore vs. that shore).

It also seems to me that my attempts to understand are or were attempts to control. But what is there to understand (in that sense)? At any time, things are as they are. Real understanding must not add something to this, otherwise it can be wiped out. It must come from the things themselves, not from me. When I try to understand, I try to grasp, try to get hold of something, but that something is like a wet piece of soap. I still try to catch it, but somehow I am less inclined to do this, because 'the real thing' is prior to it.

[N. 83]

23 August 2012

There is of course a very big difference between the Suttas in Pāli and their translations. Obviously once you understood things for yourself you are able to tell where those translations differ (if they do), and if they are accurate or not (you can even see the subtle views that a certain translator might be holding).

You wrote: "Real understanding must not add something to this, otherwise it can be wiped out..." This is very true. That's why I often say to people that they should try to understand things that are already there, in front of them, or to try to see things *within* that which is present as opposed to 'on top of it', or in *addition* to it. This takes time to develop and what one is doing here, in a nutshell, is refining one's intention (or determinations): the less your mind moves when you determine something, the more refined that determination is (or the more developed your mind is).

[M. 136]

26 August 2012

At the moment, learning Pāli appears to be ‘too much’ of an effort to me. The relief and ‘uplifting’, which I experienced in the days and first weeks after the incident from around the 1st of August, is now completely gone. But there are no regrets from my side. Something is still different, but it’s hard to tell what it is. I’m also experiencing strong emotions again (including the ‘lower’ ones). But at the same time there is more disenchantment with everything. It’s just tiring.

Nevertheless what I have experienced is certainly healthful. Regarding the voices which trouble me: I’ve found a ‘place’ which they cannot enter. It’s hard to describe. When I say that it is a kind of calm or stillness, then it would not be fully appropriate as a description. It’s a kind of ability to ‘block them out’, to ‘clean’ the body of them.

At the moment I cannot reply to you with more profound things.

[M. 137]

30 August 2012

I would like to ask you about your understanding of Māra. While it seems to me that this topic is not of personal relevance for most followers of the Buddha, in my case it triggered ‘something’. It seems to me that most Buddhists either regard Māra as a metaphor or as a mighty heavenly being in the highest of the sensual realms. Both views seem to miss the point. One of them leads me to the first question: Are there any Suttas which describe Māra as a heavenly being in the ‘sixth heaven’ of the sensual realm? I am not aware of any such Sutta. And as far as I can see, Māra cannot be regarded as ‘just another living being’.

While Māra can communicate (as he did with the Buddha), he stands out from ‘others’ in a *fundamental* way, because Māra is the only one who can *rightly* say of himself that the senses, their objects and sense-consciousness *belong to him*. When Māra proclaims this in the Māra Saṃyutta (SN 4), the Buddha did *not* disagree but *concedes* this kind of ownership to him.

To me this clearly shows that Māra is *beyond* being a recipient of the Buddha’s teaching—not because his understanding is somehow ‘blocked’

but because the teaching does *not apply to him for structural reasons*, since he actually *is* the owner, i.e. he *can* say ‘my eye’ without being subject to delusion.

But if this is the case, how can the Buddha say to him that he made demerit when troubling the Buddha or an *arahat*? How can Māra be subject to ‘worldly cause and effect’ when this very world is *his* world? I cannot bring these two things together. Can you help?

[N. 84]

9 September 2012

I am not aware of Māra being described as a ‘heavenly being’ in any of the Suttas. And indeed you are right, he is not just one among other living beings—eye and forms, ear and sounds, etc., they all *belong to* him, he is their owner. That’s why the Buddha compared these things to a *trap*, whereby an animal (human) comes and eats the bait carelessly. Because of this, the hunter (Māra) can do with him what he likes. In a different place he also said that people inflict the suffering upon themselves by using and appropriating things that do not belong to them, but to someone else (i.e. Māra). What are those things? Eye and forms, ear and sounds... So this clearly shows that Māra doesn’t do anything he is not supposed to, since he is the rightful owner of the things we assume to be ours, and that’s including ourselves. Why Māra is called the Unworthy one is because, on top of this, he also tries to deceive an individual and prevent him from seeing this state of affairs. In that way he can keep him under his power as long as he wants.

The “worldly cause and effect” you are referring to might not be as ‘worldly’ as you think. Though Māra is the owner of the senses and its objects, he is not ‘outside’ of them. Māra’s existence and his mastery are *within* the realm of ‘Self’, which means that although he owns them he also depends upon those senses. (And probably on the sense of Self too. This is a speculation but it seems reasonable to think that Māra *requires* people to hold the Self view, since that’s what maintains his existence. That is also why he would do anything to prevent one from abandoning it.)

Does this make sense? As I said these things are gently drifting into a realm of speculation which, as you already pointed out, means that as such they are not essential.

[M. 138]

12 September 2012

Yes, what you say about Māra makes sense to me (and I agree with it). On the other hand I found Suttas which don't seem to fit into that picture. For example, MN 50 says that Māra was not always Māra but a son of XYZ in a former life. This seems odd to me. AN 1:25 says that a woman (amongst other impossibilities) cannot rule the 'Māra beings'. This seems to imply that Māra is regarded as a 'king', similar to Sakka or The Great Brahmā. Another Sutta says that each 'world-system' has its own Brahmā, Sakka, Māra, etc. What does that mean?

It might sound strange, but it seems to me that all those beings are not what one thinks they are. I never talked to anyone about this, but it sometimes seems to me that they must be regarded as 'beings' in the sense of earth, water, air and fire. These are also 'beings'. It's not so easy to explain what I mean, but (for example) 'earth' has a 'character', it has a certain behaviour, which is disclosed by its appearance. But what we call an 'animal' or 'human' or 'god', they also have such a 'character'—much more complex than 'being earthy'—but not fundamentally different, i.e. they also display a certain behaviour which we then identify as 'bestial', 'human' or 'divine'. So in other words: All those beings are 'elements' of the world. They are as independent and external as the four great elements. They are 'out there'—fully. If I look out of my window and see all those people ... They don't need me. They live their own life out there. There is nothing 'in' them, nothing 'to' them. They are like stones, water and clouds. They are not subjects. They are part of nature. Part of a world which is not 'my' world. They are born, they live, suffer and die. They are not even conscious in the 'usual' sense of the word, because they are not experiencers. They are immersed totally. Even their suffering is external. 'Consciousness' of their situation can never come 'from them' but only 'to them'. That's the role of the Buddha. The 'wakening call' cannot originate in this world, it's not 'of the world'. But I fear that these thoughts are

beyond being communicable. It is like peeking into an alien world. One has a body like them, but one is not one of them. One can only pretend to be one of them, but one will never succeed. There can be no 'we', no 'us'.

I think aloneness and nothingness are the same—when one thinks it through to the end. One is none, but two are one too much. The phenomenal world is the 'two'. And the 'two' somehow defines the 'one' (which is none) as 'senses' (and *vice versa*). But there is no real connection between the two. The connection is artificial, called 'lust and desire' (for the world). But I fear that this doesn't make any sense (it's also not as clear as I want it to be).

But the usual way of thinking and understanding doesn't do the trick for me. I have to think outside the box even if this means that no-one else can help or understand. But if you can, please don't hesitate to make a comment (if you find it necessary).

[M. 139]

15 September 2012

I think, apart from my first paragraph, my last letter can be ignored (but decide for yourself). Oneself is indeed one of those 'others' out there—in Māra's world. One is one of *them*. Not 'I' (subject) amongst 'others', but just 'one of them', one of those externals. One belongs to Māra, because one is 'out there'.

It is very easy (and dangerous) that self view creeps in and seeks a 'special place' or 'role' for oneself. But there isn't. My senses belong to Māra, because they are 'out there'. Oneself is to be found 'out there', like 'others'. I think I found a nice picture which illustrates this with regard to the eye.



Selfies of Douglas Harding.

[N. 85]

23 September 2012

I can agree with your last letter, as you already pointed that out. There is no special place for any beings, they are all out there in-the-world, and that is including your very self, which is just one among many, which happens to be ‘closest’ to you in the directional experience of the world.

The picture is quite good. It shows that even oneself can only be seen ‘out there’, as an object in the world (or mirror). What I like to do sometimes is look myself in the mirror very closely so that I can see the pupils of my eyes; when I look closely at that center of my eyes all I can see is the reflection of myself looking closely at my eyes. And if my vision would be even sharper I know what I would see further: a reflection of my reflection of me looking at my eyes, and so on. This just tells you that all of it—senses and its objects—are *out there* and that there is nothing ‘inside’ of me that is not in this sense ‘out’, because when I look at my eye looking at my eye, I see the reflection of my eye which means that there is no inside of an eye that is ‘mine’. It is the appropriation that creates a division between the senses and objects, and in the same way it creates the division between me and others—without it, it would only be five-aggregates here, five-aggregates there...

I ponder over the nature of experience. It seems to be *superfluous*. When a thing appears, it is somehow 'added', and when it disappears, it is somehow 'removed'. The very fact that something is *apparent* or *present* tells me that it could also be *absent*. So it seems to me that there must be a 'point of reference' to which *neither presence nor absence* can apply. Actually the very thought of liberation implies that 'one' can *get rid of everything*, i.e. that whatever is added *can* be removed and *remain* absent. Without a *difference between before and after*, liberation is unthinkable.

It seems to me that there must be 'something' which has nothing beyond itself, i.e. to which 'appear' and 'disappear' do not apply, but which allows for 'addition' and 'removal', without actually being involved (no creator). I know that this might sound awfully 'Hinduistic' or 'mystical', but I'm not talking about 'Self' here, since it would be ridiculous to talk about mastery with regard to what I mean. I talk about 'something' whose *nature* is *beyond-ness*. 'One' cannot 'be' this, 'one' cannot 'step back' into this or 'reside' there, because 'one' fully belongs to the phenomenal sphere, which has this superfluous nature. What I mean is 'something' which one cannot 'get rid of', because it never 'stood out' in the first place, so it's not really 'something'. But it's also not 'nothing', because 'something' and 'nothing' are both concerned with things or phenomena.

I'm not a mystic and have no intention to become one, but I cannot describe it differently at the moment. I hope you understand. And I would like to hear your opinion if possible.

I just read your *Existence Means Control* ⁵² again and would like to ask you a few questions. You say: “The fact is that things can only be found when they are attended to and this means that—fundamentally speaking—they are *beyond* one’s control: one is not their *creator*.” You also say that the five-(holding-)aggregates *can* be modified or affected, which should not be confused with the notion that they are *controlled*. Who is ‘one’? Who can modify and affect (but not control)?

I’m not asking because of ‘*anattā*’, like people who would question what you say because they believe that there is ‘no one’ at all. The background for these questions is different. I feel trapped. There is an immense pressure but I don’t know where it comes from. It is as if ‘someone’ is trying with all his might to prevent that I move further. I feel somehow ‘possessed’ and ‘fogged’ (literally in the head). The only way out of this seems to be an extreme effort in mindfulness, as if *trying to regain control over my faculties*. It is as if I really have to fight in order not to ‘lose it’. But when I try to make the effort, I somehow feel ‘lost’, because the ‘combat area’ is not my own. It is very hard to describe what I mean. I don’t know myself. My last hope is that *I* can make the effort, that at least this effort is *mine* and not that of Māra. Perhaps I just want to hear from you that this is the case ... Some people would perhaps advise me to ‘give up’ and ‘surrender’, but I think I have to fight.

I just want to add that I don’t speak of an effort to *understand*. I’m actually fighting for my ‘mental health’. Similar to someone who is fighting against falling asleep after being given a narcotic. It’s like a nightmare that is no longer bearable. It seems to me *that I only ‘have’ myself*, if that makes any sense. But I’m unable to point out ‘philosophically’ what that means.

The experience seems to be unreliable to the degree of not being trustworthy at all. But at the same time one realizes that there is nothing else. This is unbearable. It is very hard to find good advice.

[M. 142]

12 November 2012

The pressure which I mentioned in my last letter has lessened, but as you see: I face the same old problems. Hopefully I will never think again that I 'achieved' something.

[M. 143]

24 November 2012

Is it possible for you to say something about consciousness as an 'element'. MN 140 for example lists the six elements: earth, water, air, fire, space and consciousness, describing the latter as 'pure and bright' (at least in the translation). What does that mean?

In his Note on RŪPA (c) Ven. Ñāṇavīra seems to regard the element of consciousness as 'existence' (in distinction from 'substance', which is matter). But this doesn't seem to fit here, because since when is 'existence' describable in terms such as 'pure and bright' and since when does 'existence' 'cognize' like in that Sutta?

To be honest, I'm really tired of all the confusion.

What is 'consciousness' in the context of the Suttas? Presence/existence? Orientation/perspective? Something else? These are *not* the same. And is the element of consciousness the same as the six classes of sense-consciousness?

There is also a certain Sutta in which Māra is looking for the 'consciousness' of an *arahat* but cannot find it. This is yet another 'consciousness' that is not at all clear. How can one look for the consciousness of an individual? One will find phenomena, nothing else.

I hope you can help. Thank you!

[N. 86]

27 November 2012

Consciousness can be understood as an ‘oriented presence’ of an experience (*Erlebnis*). In the *puthujjana* there is always *something* that is oriented, which means that his consciousness is *established*. It is because of this that Māra can see his consciousness, the establishing of a thing (i.e. establishing of *existence*) *determines* consciousness—consciousness comes to exist too (think of it as ‘pregnant presence’ or ‘presence exists’). In an *arahat* there is presence, there is orientation, but *no-thing* is oriented, which means that consciousness is not established, thus the presence of a thing cannot be *measured*, i.e. Māra cannot see it.

Does this make sense? Obviously this is a very rich topic, but rather than saying more, it’s better if I gave you the opportunity to ask questions that might arise based upon what is said above.

[M. 144]

29 November 2012

I have trouble to understand what you say and to formulate an appropriate question.

At the moment that strange feeling of oppression is quite prominent again. It’s very difficult to pin it down, to find its source, but I think this is necessary. And I think that I succeeded, at least partly. It seems to be a manifestation of ‘lack of control’, but very subtle. I would describe it like this: My ‘sense of self’ is somehow unable to ‘get behind’ the experience or behind ‘everything’ in order to ‘rule’ over it. In other words: This ‘sense of self’ does not appear as ‘*first*’ but as ‘*second*’. The sense of freedom that one has when one seems to be the ‘owner’ of the experience, is undermined. ‘I’ cannot escape into that ‘safe position behind’, which would allow me to feel as ‘the boss’ or ‘subject’. If at all, ‘I’ am embedded into a ‘framework’ which is not of my own making. There seems to be no direction into which I could escape to regain my former ‘power’. I hope this makes sense. At the moment I cannot describe it any better. But this feeling is ‘zombifying’ and unpleasant. I don’t know how to get rid of it. Even this realization doesn’t seem to be my own. It is more of a built-in feature of this alien structure. I cannot act unobserved, but this monitoring comes

from ‘*behind*’ myself. It is impossible to ascribe it to myself. I would almost say that ‘he’ (Māra) is showing off, showing me his might by applying this pressure. ‘He’ or ‘they’ even seem to be able to force all kinds of strange, seducing and threatening feelings and perceptions on one. A while ago I stood in front of the mirror and could feel how ‘someone’ made ‘my’ face smile. It was not me. It was a kind of possession. ‘Someone’ forcefully tried to smile with ‘my’ face, obviously trying to show me that ‘he’ is there. Such experiences might not appear very grave, but a little less firmness on my side, and I would ‘go mad’.

I apologize for that change of topic, but the acuteness of the problem doesn’t allow for much else.

[N. 87]

7 December 2012

Thank-you for your letter. I think I understand what you mean. The feeling of ‘oppression’ you refer to, no matter how ambiguous, is still a *thing* in your experience, so are you sure that you have to pin it down onto something? You clearly understand (and feel) the problem of the lack of control, but rather than trying to get rid of the unpleasant pressure (which might well intensify it), it’s important to develop *patience*, in the strict sense of that word. There is no need for you to try and “escape into the safe position behind,” since you clearly know that there is no such position anymore. You have to find a way of living with the present situation without resorting to the old habits of Self (control, safety, etc.). I understand that there might be a strong fear present at the prospect of letting go towards the ‘framework’ which is out of your control, so in order to do so, the five (or eight, depending on your situation) precepts have to be thoroughly established. If your actions are not purified prior to letting go, then indeed, one can go mad and lose control over oneself. How long one will have to purify the precepts I can’t say, it varies from one individual to another, but it is a necessary prerequisite.

As for Māra, if we are talking about the ‘framework’, or the structure of the experience, or the five-aggregates regardless of *upādāna*, then I can say that these things do not belong to Māra, they are out of his domain and he cannot have any influence over them. Are you sure that it is from

the direction of ‘framework’ that the pressure originates, or is it belonging to you, who is still assuming your *self* to a degree? Whenever there is ‘self’ (me or others) there is Māra. Does this help?

[M. 145]

18 December 2012

You ask: “The feeling of ‘oppression’ you refer to, no matter how ambiguous, is still a *thing* in your experience, so are you sure that you have to pin it down onto something?” I am not sure, but I think it doesn’t stand on its own. And it seems that I’m still not used to refer to such things as ‘things’ (but I agree that ‘everything’ can be called a ‘thing’).

Regarding the precepts: I try to stick as close as possible to the wholesome bodily and verbal conduct as pointed out in MN 41 (Sāleyyaka Sutta: ‘The Brahmins of Sālā’). Despite the fact that I still slip from time to time, I see the danger and feel pain when doing wrong. But here I mainly talk about mistakes that most people would certainly regard as normal, i.e. talking too much or showing one’s anger (to a certain degree) when talking. Things like killing, stealing or lying are out of the question. I would feel like intentionally throwing myself into ‘hell’ when doing these things. But I say this as someone who used to kill (animals) and to lie (even to my parents) a lot in my childhood and youth.

I have *much* more trouble to restrain the senses. Often I act like a pendulum. When I indulged I feel bad and abstain, but after a while I can no longer resist and do it again, etc. Perhaps it has also something to do with the *patience* you mention, i.e. I’m not able or willing to *endure* the pain of abstention. I have to remark ironically that it seems that I need to be in bad health in order to do what is necessary here, and I have no doubt that life will bless me abundantly with what I need, sooner or later—since that’s the ‘point’ of having this kind of body.

You ask: “Are you sure that it is from the direction of ‘framework’ that the pressure originates, or is it belonging to you, who is still assuming your *self* to a degree?” I have to admit that I’m not sure about that. It seems to me that it has something to do with the structure of the All. It is not possible to perceive the whole, i.e. the totality of perceived things is

not the All, it's only one half or side of it, so one will never get rid of the 'pressure of incompleteness', because of the senses which lurk behind.

Usually one thinks that one is (at) the center, but now it seems that whatever is perceived is off-center or external, however slightly. The 'middle' is no longer a thing but a gap. And beyond that gap, opposed to what is perceived as external, lurk the senses—beyond reach. So there is no place where one could be.

I have a question: How is it possible to touch something with a stick, i.e. to discover the surface structure of something by touching it with a stick? There are no 'nerve endings' in the stick, but I'm not willing to regard this experience as an illusion as 'science' would certainly do. I understand that one must *hold* the stick in order to touch with it. And at first this led me to the conclusion that one must hold one's senses in a similar way to perceive with them. But this is not satisfying, because any holding mechanism, like the muscles, would need to be held by yet another holding mechanism and so on *ad infinitum*.

Another question: Why can I discover the surface structure of something (like roughness) with a stick but not its temperature? Why is it not possible to experience temperature as external to one's body, like colour or sound? When I touch something cold for example, that thing is sensed as cold because it locally removes heat from the body. There is no other way to experience it as cold unless by loss of one's own warmth. Or another example: As a source of *light*, the sun appears to be *shining at a distance*, but *not* so as a source of warmth. The sun is *heating the body without appearing as 'warm' at a distance*.

With regard to this, it seems to me that warmth is closer to feeling than to perception. Can you help to understand this?

- 44. Tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *MLDB*, p. 283.
- 45. Tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *MLDB*, p. 279.
- 46. Tr. Sister Upalavanna, <http://www.metta.lk/tipitaka/2Sutta-Pitaka/2Majjhima-Nikaya/Majjhima1/028-mahahatthipadopama-sutta-e1.html>
- 47. Venerable Ajahn Paṇṇāvaddho (1925, England – 2004, Thailand) was senior *bhikkhu* living in Wat Ban Thad with Ajahn Maha Boowa. More on <http://www.forestdhamma.org/about/panya/>
- 48. *NoD*, PHASSA (c).
- 49. Dh 277-9.
- 50. *CtP*, pp. 364-5 and 388.
- 51. *NoD*, PHASSA (c).
- 52. See p. 5.

2013

[N. 88]

8 January 2013

You said: “I have to admit that I’m not sure about that. It seems to me that it has something to do with the structure of the All. It is not possible to perceive the whole, i.e. the totality of perceived things is not the All, it’s only one half or side of it, so one will never get rid of the ‘pressure of incompleteness’, because of the senses, which lurk behind.”

I agree: perception is just a part of the whole, and if by “because of the senses, which lurk behind” you mean that senses are *implied*, then again—I agree. However, I still don’t see why the ‘pressure of incompleteness’ is something to be rid of? One can infer thus that when you are trying to get rid of it, you are determining it as something which *should not* be there, which doesn’t *belong* to the experience as a whole. You are denying its presence (existence), despite the fact that it is *there* pressuring, incomplete, ambiguous, whatever—but nevertheless: part of the whole thing.

Regarding your question about the stick: the stick or any other ‘instrument’ your body might assimilate in its oriented environment (such as: spectacles, a cane, a car, etc.) becomes an *extension* of your body. The resistance the stick encounters when being held, is sensed by your arm (body) and provides a perception of the world like any other experience, albeit less accurate and precise. (In the case of a stick, the reverse is true for a pair of spectacles on a person who has poor sight.) Merleau-Ponty and Sartre write extensively about it.

You wrote: “And at first this led me to the conclusion that one must hold one’s senses in a similar way to perceive with them. But this is not

satisfying, because any holding mechanism, like the muscles, would be in need to be held by yet another holding mechanism and so on *ad infinitum*.”

Senses are held in a similar way if only by that we mean that they are *appropriated*. (Once a person is used to seeing the world through the glasses, they ‘become’ one’s eyes, one ceases to be aware of them as a separate object.) However, in terms of one’s own body, we have to say that one’s world is measured by the senses, so one cannot take an external view and imagine the senses being held from a ‘neutral’ position. And if by ‘mechanisms’ you tacitly imply *rūpa*, then yes—it goes into infinity (muscles can be broken into fibers, which can be broken into amino-acids, which can be broken into carbon molecules... and this can go as far as our powers of observation (perception) allow, and then when in a decade or so scientists develop even more powerful magnifying apparatuses we’ll discover that there are even smaller things and so on).

You asked: “Why can I discover the surface structure of something (like roughness) with a stick but not its temperature?” The answer is simple: because it belongs to the sense of *touch*. Heat, as one of the ‘life forces’ (from the Suttas) pertains to the extension of one’s body, which means that it can only be experienced through the sense of touch. Also you need to bear in mind that, when you are experiencing things directly through your body, that experience is not *in space*, it reveals it through the object that is touched. (It gets ‘localized’, which then in turn puts your body in a spatial position too.) This applies to water, air and earth as well, not just heat or fire. The difference is that when you are touching an object with a stick, the thing discovered through the stick is *secondary*—the spatiality was already set by picking up a stick, which means that the roughness of the object presented through the stick will be *in space*. This means that, despite the fact you are technically still touching the object, you are also ‘seeing’ it, with your eyes (i.e. ‘in space’ means that the visual field is involved—and this applies to a blind person too).

Warmth can never be closer to feeling, because it is a *perception*. The reason for your confusion lies in assuming priority of ‘vision’ (it’s a ‘double sense’, remember) over other senses, which results in giving it a central role, which then in return gets to solely qualify as ‘perception’. Because of this all the other ‘simpler’ (not dual) senses are marginalized, and even identified with a feeling. All you have to bear in mind is that the

feeling can be pleasant, unpleasant and neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant, so no matter how unclear and ambiguous a thing may be, and whether you even lack the words for describing it—if what a thing is, doesn't fall into one of the three feelings—it is *perceived*. Feeling is *felt*, perception is *perceived*—these two can never mix and intrude on each other's domains. (It is at the root of this same confusion where people introduce the notion of 'sensation', for which check *CtP* where Ven. Ñāṇavīra quotes Sartre from *Being and Nothingness*.)⁵³

[M. 146]

10 January 2013

In this letter, I would like to restrict myself to your answers regarding my questions about the stick and warmth.

You say (underlining by me): “The difference is that when you are touching an object with a stick, the thing discovered through the stick is *secondary*—the spatiality was already set by picking up a stick, which means that the roughness of the object presented through the stick will be *in space*. This means that, despite the fact you are—technically—still touching the object, you are also ‘seeing’ it, with your eyes (i.e. ‘in space’ means that the visual field is involved—and this applies to a blind person too).”

And (underlining by me): “The reason for your confusion lies in tacitly assuming priority of ‘vision’ (it's a ‘double sense’ remember) over other senses...”

Please correct me if I misrepresent you, but you seem to say that *whenever* we perceive something ‘at a distance’, it is due to the *eye*, *regardless* of the ‘secondary qualities’ of that thing (be it colour or roughness or whatever).

I don't know, but it seems to me that *too much* of one's experience is ascribed to the *eye* here. If you think that my following explanations are faulty, please don't hesitate to correct me. I'm still investigating.

At the moment, my understanding of the six senses and their *relation* seems to change. What we perceive is *matter*. And the only way to perceive matter is through its *appearance*. And *matter together with its*

appearance is a *phenomenon*. So a phenomenon is not a 'simple' thing but a *compound* of 'substance' and 'appearance'.

I now think that 'the All' is about the *origination* of phenomena, so the actual *arrangement* of the six senses must somehow *reflect the compound-nature of phenomena*.

What does that mean? It means that the *five* senses are *solely* concerned with the *appearance* of things, while the mind is concerned with their *substance* or *matter* (or with the *thing itself*, if you want). Since the substance is only perceived when it appears, *mind relies on the five senses in order to perceive its object ('things')*.

So the six senses must be arranged in a way which takes account of that. It's not just eye + ear + nose + tongue + body + mind. Instead mind must be '*central*' (because *it doesn't matter how matter appears*) and the other five senses must be '*peripheral*' (because *one and the same matter can appear in different ways, even at the same time*).

In other words: The very existence of phenomena (with their compound-nature) *requires* a certain arrangement or order of the six senses, in which the mind *always* plays the *central role*. This also means that *at least two senses* are needed in order for phenomena to arise. One of them *must* be the mind, the other is optional.

Now there *might* be an exception, and this leads me back to the topic of *space*. In the case of the formless realms, the five senses are 'quiet', but the mind is still 'at work', so to speak. If matter can no longer appear, the perception of 'infinite space' seems to be the only option for the mind. The 'element of space' could therefore be regarded as an *incomplete* phenomenon, if (and only if) we define 'completeness' in terms of 'normal' perception, which always includes matter.

I have no meditative experience of the formless realms, but the actual point is that *both matter (four great elements) and space* are *mind-objects*. And space can be perceived as *pure* or *elemental space* when matter is no longer able to appear, due to 'lack' of the five senses (which, as I said, are concerned *only* with what matter '*looks like*').

In order to support what I have said, let me refer to AN 1:1, where the Buddha says that no other shape, voice, scent, taste or touch is as captivating (for men) as the shape, voice, scent, taste and touch of 'a

woman'. I think that this Sutta (beside its other implications) can tell us quite a lot about what is actually meant by the senses and their objects.

The first thing is that it doesn't matter whether we treat 'woman' as real or imaginary here. In *both* cases 'she' has a shape, a voice, etc. In other words: Imaginary or absent women are *included*. The five senses are at work *also* when we imagine or dream, i.e. colour (for example) always means that the eye is there, not just when we see 'real' things.

Secondly, if we *superimpose* that Sutta onto Suttas about the six internal and external sense bases, we find that shape, voice, scent, taste and touch—or the appearance of 'the woman'—are the external counterparts of the *five* senses (imagination *included*). So what is left here as the actual *counterpart of mind* is only 'the woman', i.e. that which can appear through all of the five senses and is perceptible only because of that appearance.

Subjectively speaking, mind is the 'from-where' of perception, whereas the five senses are the 'through-which'. Both are 'empty', i.e. they are *not phenomena* but more a kind of 'framework' that allows for the presence of phenomena in the first place.

It should be clear, but when I say that matter is perceived by the mind *through* the five senses, I don't want to say that the five senses are mere windows through which already existing phenomena can just pass. Instead the matter which is perceived by the mind '*acquires*' an appearance through the five senses (which includes extension, but *not* distance, which is mind-dependent). So the matter which is seen, heard, etc. does only 'exist' 'out there' from the point of view of the mind, but it is *not* 'out there', i.e. it does *not* 'come in' from the outside. Such an independent substance 'out there' is a kind of mirage—as well as an independent (substance) 'in here'. The mind (subjectively speaking) has no substance at all (and the substance of the world is a *perceived one*).

So I'm *not sure* that the Buddha treated the senses in the same way as we did within that context or as (for example) Sartre or Merleau-Ponty did. I don't want to say that they are wrong (since this is often a matter of context), but after all they are only reliable to a certain extent.

Regarding my answers that you underlined: you seem to have overlooked that we were not talking about the experience of an object (be it visual, tactile, etc.), but were talking about experiencing an object *through* an object “touching a thing with a stick.” All of my answers should be regarded in this context and the same applies to references to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. This should clear up the misunderstanding regarding the first part.

The second one is interesting: “you seem to say that *whenever* we perceive something ‘at a distance’, it is due to the *eye*, *regardless* of the ‘secondary qualities’ of that thing (be it colour or roughness or whatever).”

Far from saying that whenever there is a perception of space, it’s always due to the eye, what I was trying to point out is that your mistake of regarding ‘warmth’ as feeling is because ‘eye’ tacitly plays a central role in your experience, and despite you thinking of touching something, you are actually *seeing* it (even in your imagination). I might be wrong though, perhaps I misunderstood you, so please correct me if I’m wrong.

To put all this concisely: space is perceived. By which sense it doesn’t matter, sense of touch reveals your body, which being of-space is also in-space when perceived by other senses; sense of vision again reveals the space, not as a positive but a negative (and if I understand you, you would agree), and so on. Theoretically speaking, it would be impossible for a sense, on its own, to perceive the space. I know that even speculating about this doesn’t serve the purpose, but I just want to illustrate that, without the mind, space wouldn’t be distinguished (being the negative that it is). This brings me to the rest of your letter which deals with mind.

It’s actually more correct to say ‘consciousness’ than ‘mind’, in the context we are talking of. I’ll get to that. In principle I agree with most of what you said in the rest of your letter, and your description of the relationship between mind and matter, and the five-senses and appearance, is quite good (provided I didn’t misunderstand it). It subtly shows how beside matter, senses, appearance, even the mind is not one’s own, it’s ‘out there’, next to the matter that is being perceived. And it is for this very reason that I think it is more accurate to say consciousness,

since this is more of a structural matter or ‘framework’, rather than the active, intelligent, choice-making, volitional side of our experience known as *mano*. If we reserve consciousness for that role, the Buddha’s description of the four great elements plus space plus consciousness becomes much more intelligible. The experience as a whole is comprised of these things, when you remove earth, water, fire and air, when you distinguish space and the presence of it all (i.e. consciousness), there is nothing left, the whole experience has been included, with its positives and negatives, the All. If I remember correctly Ven. Ñāṇavīra also refers to this Sutta. Those four *mahābhūtas*, with space and consciousness, are a sufficient basis upon which one can remove all of the lust in regard to the existence.

There are some points of your description that I don’t agree with, but let me hear what you have to say on the above, before I go into them, because it might well turn out to be completely irrelevant.

[M. 148]

11 January 2013

Yes, it seems that I have overlooked that we were not talking about the experience of an object but about experiencing an object through an object. I think that I needed to hear these few words in order to move on. Thank you! Without your support, it would take much longer.

It might sound ridiculous, but I regard most of what I said in my last letter as already ‘outdated’ again. I’m sorry. As far as I can see at the moment, you are right with your comments. But I would like to share my ‘new insights’ with you. After all, they are still ‘on-topic’ and, at least initially, the result of your reply.

As far as I can see now, space is disclosed by *any* of the senses, but in *different* ways. I was pondering about ‘vision’, when it occurred to me that light needs *darkness* in order to be revealed (e.g. stars can be seen only in the dark). And that ‘things’ need *light* in order to be revealed (a tree can be seen only in the presence of a source of light). Actually this is not the point, but I say it first to make it easier to follow me. So *darkness* comes *before* ‘light’, since the latter needs it to be manifest. It was at that point, when I understood the relation of space and the four *mahābhūtas* as far as

the eye or vision is concerned. The eye discloses the element of space as darkness. But it meets (contacts) the four mahābhūtas as 'form' (that 'shines').

For me, there are two important points here: 1) The eye does *not contact* space, it *discloses* space (as requirement for coming in contact with matter). 2) The eye meets *any matter whatsoever as form*, not just what we call sources of light (like the sun) or things that reflect light (like a tree). So (for example) the 'solidity' of *my thumb*, when I press it into my eyeballs, is met as 'shining form' as well. But in any case, *space must already be disclosed* for contact to be possible at all.

It might be a trivial matter, but for me this was hard to see. Especially the difference between *disclosure* in the case of space, and *contact* in the case of matter is quite subtle. But I think to see it makes a huge difference. If we say that the eye also *discloses* matter (instead of *meeting* it), the eye is reduced to a mere window and we need a subject in order to account for contact. When I look back, I think that I *somehow* made this mistake in my last letter. I called that subject 'mind', the supposed 'from-where' of *all the five sense-experiences*.

Since the contact is not a disclosure of already existing *phenomena*, it can only be a '*modification*' of the eye, possible because the eye has disclosed space or an 'out there' that allows for such kind of external 'influence'. You also used the term 'modification' in a past letter, but at that time I could not understand it as I understand it now.

In the case of the *ear*, the element of space is disclosed as *silence*. And the four *mahābhūtas* are contacted as *sound*.

If we understand this disclosure (of space) to be *consciousness*, it is also clear why consciousness *precedes* contact.

I'm not yet able to apply the same kind of understanding to the body and the mind, since it is still very fresh. Perhaps you can comment. If you think I made an error, please comment as well. But even if I'm still wrong, it feels as if I'm at least *less wrong* than before.

[M. 149]

11 January 2013

What I said in my last letter is not entirely correct. But at the moment, I am not ready to write another 'big' letter. At the moment I can only say this: Whenever space is disclosed, the *mahābhūtas* are also disclosed, but *pre-disclosed*. This means that they are already determined as (for example) 'form', whether a form is actually met or not. If there is an eye, matter is already disclosed, in the sense that it is *bound to appear as form* 'before' the contact actually happens.

[M. 150]

15 January 2013

Regarding the perception of something *through* something, I would like to add a few things: I think that, at least in principle, *any* object can both either *hide* or *reveal*, i.e. it can be *opaque* or *transparent* ('let through'). Quite often I see figures and faces on the carpet. As I understand it at the moment, that does *not* mean that 'the brain' *constructs* figures and faces by *connecting* 'dots' on the carpet (as science seems to claim), but instead I no longer see the *carpet* but *through* the carpet (at least partly). The same with a painting or a monitor: To see (for example) a tree on a painting or on TV means to see something (the tree) *through* another thing (the canvas or TV set). Even understanding a text seems to involve that mechanism: I see/hear *through* the text (something) the things that it *means* (other things). 'Insight' is *seeing-through*. I think in the case of the Buddha, all things are transparent in that sense. One 'just' has to learn 'how to' see through, 'how to' approach a thing in a way that makes it reveal other things through itself.

But I'm still not sure whether we actually perceive objects *through* the senses in the same way we perceive an object *through* a TV set, i.e. whether the term 'through' is correct at all when it comes to the senses. Because to perceive *through* the senses implies to be located *behind* them. But *what* can be located behind them? 'Behindness' would be the nature of that thing. Consciousness? The subject? I think that something is wrong here.

So at the moment it seems to me that the ‘through’ of perception is *between* the *senses* and their *objects*. So perception is not through the *senses* but ‘by’ the senses *through* ‘something’ that lies between them and the object. In other words: the ‘middle’ between ‘me’ and the objects are not the senses. Instead, the ‘middle’ is between the senses and the objects.

How do you see this? Do ‘I’ see through the eye or through ‘whatever’ is between the eye and the object?

[N. 90]

31 January 2013

The eye indeed *meets* the matter, before it discloses space (hence the structure of our experience is ‘of space’, not *in* it). However ‘meeting’ the matter is not the same as ‘contact’, which you seemed to identify in your letter. Contact occurs once the meeting took place and the subject (Self) is there, loosely speaking. Thus ‘meeting’ of the matter is ‘pre-intentional, pre-affective and pre-perceptive’, if you know what I mean. Obviously this should be understood in *ākālika* sense—meeting, intention, feeling and perception, space, are there at the same time (and to the same extent, not a bit more or less), but they differ in their structural positions. That’s why by seeing ‘meeting’ as something utterly and inherently out of one’s control, ‘it’s there, it takes place of its own accord,’ one can cease appropriating one’s very intentions, feelings, perceptions and thoughts, one can cease to be contacted.

Also a slight digression now, it is because the meeting is already *there*, even if one’s intentions aim at it, it is always unreachable, since just the fact that intention is there means that the meeting is too—*beforehand*. (In a similar way the four *mahābhūtas* are always ‘below one’s feet’.)

To get back to your letter: based on the above, it would be more correct to say that the disclosure of space occurs as a result of the meeting taking place, not the other way round. That’s why although space is a negative, it is secondary to the four *mahābhūtas* (its negativity is in relation to things that are in space). But then I agree with you in saying that space precedes contact, i.e. it has to be disclosed in order for one to be contacted. To be even more precise we can say that it is the very disclosure of space, when

one's conceit is not abolished, that contacts one—'I' becomes spatial, one's world becomes world in space.

[N. 91]

31 January 2013

I've just read this addition to your letter, and realized that you saw your previous error. Anyway, further reflection on the matter can bring no harm...

[M. 151]

5 February 2013

You say: "The eye indeed meets the matter, before it discloses space (hence the structure of our experience is 'of space', not in it). However 'meeting' the matter is not the same as 'contact', which you seemed to identify in your letter." Is there a different Pāli word, or how to distinguish 'meeting the matter' and 'contact' when reading the Suttas? Sometimes the Suttas say that contact is the coming together of *three*: eye, forms, eye-consciousness; and sometimes just *two*: eye and forms.

You say: "Contact occurs once the meeting took place and the subject (Self) is there, loosely speaking. Thus 'meeting' of the matter is 'pre-intentional, pre-affective and pre-perceptive', if you know what I mean." I have to rely on translations when reading the Suttas, but these translations say that feeling, perception and intention are based on 'contact', so *contact* is pre-affective, pre-perceptive and pre-intentional. So what you call 'meeting' is obviously translated as 'contact' (eye-contact, ear-contact, etc.). But what is the translation of the thing that you call 'contact' here?

Or is it just a difference in 'perspective'? You can describe *my* seeing in terms of 'eye meets form', or I can do this myself by regarding myself as 'another'. But 'subjectively', *I am* in contact with forms, i.e. no organ 'eye' seems to be involved. Is this what you mean?

How would you classify an afterimage within that context? If I look into a bright light source and then close my eyes or look away, I still see 'something' that resembles that light source by shape and colour. In such a case, does the eye 'meet' the afterimage? Or does the afterimage come

later, *after* meeting the actual light source? I intentionally chose the example of the afterimage and not pressure phosphenes or something like that, because the afterimage is clearly related to what one has seen right before.

[N. 92]

17 February 2013

There is a slight point that eluded you from my previous letter. Let me explain:

Contact is indeed coming together of the three—eye, forms and eye-consciousness—and that’s how I (implicitly) referred to it in my previous letter. However we were not actually talking about coming together of the three (not initially at least), but coming together of the *two*,—namely: *eye* and *forms*. (You: “The eye *discloses* the element of space as *darkness*. But it *meets* (*contacts*) the four *mahābhūtas* as ‘form’ (that ‘shines’).” This ‘meeting’ of the eye and forms must be *distinguished* from the ‘meeting’ of the eye, form and eye-consciousness (regardless of how one chooses to call that). It is to this meeting (*eye*, as a material organ, out there, and *forms*, again material, out there) that I was referring to when I said ‘pre-intentional, pre-affective and pre-perceptive’. Does this make sense? When eye engages with the form (or even ‘collides’) *and* when ‘corresponding consciousness’ is present, that *one* is contacted (if *avijjā* is still there). However, even when one is already contacted one can still know that that contact was possible to arise only *because* of the ‘collision’ of that completely ‘external’ meeting (which is clearly something utterly beyond one’s control). Furthermore that meeting is *still there*, and it will be there as long as one is *contacted*. (This should answer your query about an afterimage: the original collision is there and it *changes while remaining the same*: the thing or experience (*dhamma*) that has arisen as a result of that contact also changes—direct light, then afterimage (since material eye still *endures* that meeting with the light, or the *remnants* of the light are still present)—while still remaining the *same thing* (unless of course you choose to attend to any of the particular aspects individually when they will indeed become a ‘new thing’, a ‘different experience’, but that’s more of an ‘attention’ topic.)

Out of curiosity, could you please provide me with the reference to the Sutta(s) that refers to contact as coming together of the eye and forms only (or does it say “conscious eye and forms”?). It seems that we can safely ascribe the misunderstanding to mere semantics.

[M. 152]

19 February 2013

Let me begin with the last paragraph. You ask for the reference to the Sutta(s). It seems that I was thinking of a particular aspect of *paṭiccasamuppāda*: “with six bases as condition, contact.” Here, only the bases (six pairs) are mentioned as condition for contact. But I have to admit that at the time when I wrote that the Suttas sometimes describe contact as the coming together of only two (eye and forms, etc.), I had no particular Sutta in mind and was writing out of a rather vague ‘impression’. I’m sorry.

I.

As I said, I have to rely on translations, and as far as I can remember, I never came across a ‘conscious eye’. So what does it mean: ‘conscious eye and forms’? My translations only speak of ‘eye’ or ‘Auge’ (German), but sometimes a translator seems to prefer ‘seeing’ or ‘sight’ over ‘eye’, so instead of ‘eye and forms’ they read ‘seeing/sight and forms’. Perhaps it is worth mentioning here that Paul Debes said that ‘*cakkhu*’ should not be translated as ‘eye’. He said (I translate into English roughly):

While we only speak of eyes, ears, nose, etc., the Indian speaks of these visible bodily organs only in case they are damaged or missing, calling them *akkhi* (eye), *kannam* (ear), *nasa* (nose), etc. But when there is talk of the sense organs in their activity during sensory perception, not only those organs but also the urges dwelling in them are mentioned, which allow for sensory perception in the first place, by the terms *cakkhu*, *sotam*, *ghanam*, etc. If we want to translate these terms correctly, then we must say: Not the eyes but the peeker [Luger], the

compulsive urge, sees forms, not the ears but the eavesdropper [Lauscher], the compulsive urge, hears sounds, etc.⁵⁴

I doubt that you mean the same thing when you speak of a ‘conscious eye’, but Paul Debes was of the opinion that there is a kind of ‘body in the body’ (the *nāma-kāya* in the *rūpa-kāya*) which *together* make perception possible. Actually he believed that the *nāma-kāya* was in union with a subtle *rūpa-kāya* and the coarse *rūpa-kāya* is only a vessel for them, i.e. he believed that we are otherworldly beings (like the ghosts and *devas*) which live temporarily in a body of meat. At least up to a certain degree this seems to be true and supported by experience (out-of-body experiences), but this does not mean that his interpretation of the core-Dhamma is correct.

But unfortunately I don’t understand the crucial part of your letter.

II.

Now my problem is that I don’t know where to begin. Perhaps here: With regard to the meeting, you speak of “*eye, as a material organ, out there, and forms, again material, out there*” (underlining mine). Now the Suttas don’t seem to speak of *both* the eye and forms ‘out there’, i.e. they don’t say: “When *externally* the eye is intact and *externally* forms come into range,” instead they say: “When *internally* the eye is intact and *externally* forms come into range.” I understand that the eye, as a material organ, is ‘below one’s feet’ and can be called ‘out there’ because of that. But then the question is, why do the Suttas call the eye *internal even before* ‘seeing’ occurs? If ‘internal’ means ‘appropriated’, then (according to the Suttas) the material organs are appropriated *before* they meet matter, but this would require an independent Self. Or let me try to explain this differently: You once said that the body is a product of the senses. I understand this to mean that only a *product* of the senses can be appropriated (and because of this, ‘ownership’ depends on something uncontrollable). But the Suttas seem to say that the material senses are appropriated or ‘internalized’ *before* sense perception occurs, i.e. that

appropriation is *required* for it to occur at all. I hope you understand what I mean here.

There is also another aspect of it: If *both* eye and forms are ‘out there’, then *none* of them is privileged to become the ‘internal’ part of the dyad. There can only be the ‘point of contact’ between two equally external ‘things’. In other words: ‘One’ can neither ‘be’ on the side of the eye nor on the side of the forms (nor between). So a single eye (with no other sense involved) *would not* constitute a kind of ‘subjectivity’ or ‘interiority’ even if contacted by forms, because that would require the matter of the eye to be more ‘subjective’ or more ‘internal’ than the matter of the forms. There could only be a point of contact but no ‘place to be’ for the Self on either of the sides or in between, i.e. there would not be what we call ‘seeing’. But yet, the Suttas seem to regard the eye as more internal than the forms (e.g. MN 28) ...

Nevertheless, when I see a tree for example, the tree is ‘over there’ while I am ‘here’. But in the light of what I just said, this spatial relation of *here/over there* cannot be explained just by referring to the dyad of *eye/tree*. Because the eye, as a material organ, has no more right to be ‘here’ *by virtue of meeting matter* than the tree. In other words: If the eye is not-self it *has* to be ‘out there’ or ‘below one’s feet’ *together with the tree*. To say that the tree is pointing to the eye already assumes the subjectivity of the eye and is therefore wrong. The eye is not more subjective than the tree so one could equally say that the eye points to the tree. All this doesn’t make sense. But why then is the eye ‘here’ or ‘on my side’ while the tree is not? I see only one solution to this problem:

Other senses are involved. The ‘experiential’ or ‘lived body’ emerges at the *point of contact between the different senses*. If there were no contact between the senses, there would be no body and no world. For example: One of the forms by which the eye is contacted is the body (sense of touch) and *vice versa*. This ‘*vice versa*’ is the important part here. The contact between eye and body (sense of touch), which are *both* ‘out there’, seems to give the impression of watching the tree ‘from here’, where ‘here’ is actually the point of contact between eye and body, i.e. this contact gives the eye a location (being ‘closer’ than the tree) *which it does not have by itself*.

I would like to say more, but I’m quite exhausted now. I hope it is still enough to give you an impression of my current standpoint. Please

correct me wherever you think I am wrong.

What happened to me on the 1st of August was somehow the ‘loss of contact’ *between the senses*, which revealed what I can only call ‘the unborn’, which is ‘prior to contact’. This experience somehow functions as a ‘corrective’, telling me that something is wrong with this or that view, but I am stubborn, so it cannot always penetrate. There is also an all-pervasive sense of powerlessness and an inability to locate myself. But this is paralyzing. There is still a lot of resistance. But what can ‘I’ do when I cannot even locate myself? My mother has the impression of losing me, because I appear ‘cold’. When I tried to tell her what is happening to me (she wanted to know), she began to cry. She seems to believe that this is or could be a sign of a progressing mental illness and that something horrible ‘is going to happen’. I could feel her dread. I replied that the most horrible thing already happened to me: I am alive and have to die. The normal state is the illness, but I think this cannot be seen as long as one is totally ‘immersed’. The solution seems to lie in the midst of the worst anxiety. I can understand that it might be better never to utter a word about these things. And I see how stupid the Mahāyāna belief is to attempt to save all beings. They will kill you, when you attempt it.

Sorry for the digression, but sometimes it can be hard to remain silent.

[M. 153]

19 February 2013

I don’t want to be overly pedantic, especially not with something off-topic, but I have to correct the last paragraph of my last letter. Actually my mother said that she fears that there is something horrible going on *with me* (instead of ‘going to happen’ *to me*, as I mistakenly wrote). And I said to her that the anxiety is the most horrible thing (instead of being alive and having to die, which I certainly *meant* but did not say).

It was not my intention to deceive you about what happened, but when I wrote it, my memory was not as clear as it is now and I also ‘interpreted’ for you what happened instead of just telling the fact. I’m sorry to bother you with such trifle, but I couldn’t stand this incorrectness. Even little things can burn.

Here is my provisional solution (I try to keep things as simple as possible, which might be a mistake, but I want to limit the confusion as much as possible):

- 1) 'Consciousness' is the first-person perspective or being-in-the-world.
- 2) The six senses and their 'objects' are the answer to the question: What must be there in order for the first-person perspective to occur? In other words: The Buddha introduces an external point of view or the third-person perspective in order to show that 'consciousness' or 'being in the world' depends on something that is beyond one's control, namely matter.
- 3) The crucial point is that this introduction of the third-person perspective is *not meant to deny or reduce* the first-person perspective but to put it into a proper context, which allows for liberation. In other words: The first-person perspective *must not be left* when introducing the external point of view, i.e. when considering the senses and their objects.
- 4) It is because of *this* that the senses can be called 'internal', i.e. one applies the *external* point of view (or what the Buddha taught) to *oneself*, i.e. to the first-person perspective or 'consciousness' or being-in-the-world.
- 5) And I *assume* (please correct me if I'm wrong) that the 'conscious eye' is also related to what I just pointed out, i.e. the 'conscious eye' is *that* external thing because of which there is 'seeing' (referring to the first-person perspective here).

I don't want to complicate things unnecessarily, so I will stop here.

[M. 155]

26 February 2013

What I wrote in my last letter (on the 22nd) now appears hollow and empty to me. Be it my own attempts or your explanations—I almost always discover some ‘impossibilities’. We have been doing this for five years now. What happened to you? How did you arrive where you are? On the pictures you don’t look much older than me. Was there a ‘miracle’ in your life? I feel like a ripe fruit that cannot fall. There is this paralysis. Everything seems to be out of reach, including ‘myself’. And what is left is only powerlessness. The trouble is the effort which is needed to ‘move on’, but ‘I’ cannot *make* it, if you know what I mean. I can’t reach myself. How can ‘I’ make ‘myself’ do things? This might sound very stupid, but it really is a problem. I can’t get hold of myself. The very ‘I’, the point ‘from where’ the ‘doing’ originates, is not available. Any attempt to get hold of myself puts (or assumes) ‘myself’ out of reach, into the realm of things ‘out there’. But I fear that I get lost in words here. I don’t even know how I can write this letter. And this is very bothersome. I fear that I cannot progress on the path. As long as you think you can do it, everything is fine, but when even ‘I’ and ‘my abilities’ are beyond reach, the question of ‘doing something’ becomes a riddle. I don’t know if there can be any help here.

[N. 93]

27 February 2013

Ownerlessness is the result of things ultimately being out of your control. What you have to get at is the understanding that there is nothing you can actually *do* about it, in the sense of ‘perform’. Things don’t originate from anything, let alone one’s Self. All it is, is that things are *there*. Look at your experience as a whole, just look, don’t try to dissect it in terms of *nāmarūpa* or similar, just look at the whole single vast ambiguous phenomenon present, together with the elusive sense of Self, and just *determine* that whole thing as *impermanent and unpleasurable*. Then do it again, and again...

Determine it, as an act of mind, but not an act that would become a phenomenon in itself, but an act *in relation* to the original phenomenon (i.e. experience as a whole) present, while the original phenomenon still

endures. *Determining* would be more of an attitude in regard to the phenomenon, it would be a ‘thing’ *simultaneously present* with the phenomenon, but on a different level; it would be another *this* in relation to *this* which is *imasmim sati, idam hoti* (“When there is this this is”).

I am 29 now. If I remember correctly you are a year older than me. There were really no miracles in my life; there is nothing externally given to me, you or anyone else. If one acquires something it is through one’s own effort and development. For those very same reasons it cannot be taken away by anybody. And when I say ‘effort’, don’t think of it in terms of doing something; yes, there is keeping the precepts, restraint, etc., but the actual *Dhamma* cannot be ‘done’—you cannot reach the cessation of action by acting. However, *regarding* whatever act you have present (that is purified beforehand through precepts) as *impermanent* and *suffering* is a different matter. And strictly speaking that’s all you have to ‘do’, since there is nothing else that can be done.

[M. 156]

2 March 2013

It’s not easy to write an answer. The trouble with ‘just looking’ at the ‘whole single vast ambiguous phenomenon present’ is that this ‘whole’ seems to include any of my attempts to ‘relate to’ it, to ‘look at’ it. So any movement or effort on my part becomes immediately *part of the problem*. But that doesn’t mean that I don’t *try* what you said.

At the moment I feel unable to respond otherwise or in more detail. I’m sorry. The problem is grave.

I’m 32 and was a little surprised by your relatively young age. Not that you *look* older (hard to judge anyway), but usually people seem to waste or need more time.

[M. 157]

3 March 2013

Yesterday (*after* I wrote you the letter) I found a little relief when it occurred to me that there is also an ‘organ’ for understanding (the ‘mind’), so understanding cannot be ‘done’ (in a similar way that seeing or hearing cannot be ‘done’), i.e. it is *conditioned*.

I also want to add that I'm still interested in an answer to my letter "meeting and contact" from the 19th of February (regarding the 'conscious eye', etc.).

[N. 94]

12 March 2013

This is indeed so. And that often is my whole point. You cannot 'create' or 'invent' or 'originate' anything, *whatever* you experience (material, mental) is *given beforehand*, or simply *there*. You always *find it*, and that is sufficient for it to show you that you are not the master of anything.

Any movement and effort on your part is the problem. By looking at the whole picture, don't expect to be able to put your movement *in front of you*, since that wouldn't be the whole picture (if you try to put your effort 'into' the picture, something else would then be behind). The whole picture means 'in front' stays 'in front', and 'behind' (or peripheral) stays 'behind'.

Reply to the letter of 19 February 2013:

Think of the problem from the part I in terms of one of the descriptions of the *arahat's* experience: there is this conscious body and name-and-matter externally. This simply means that the body and consciousness are there together, neither of them is yours and neither of them can pertain to you. I can see that Debes got a hint of it, in the passage you translated, but fundamentally he completely misunderstood it. *Cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāna*, etc. are indeed more 'active' so to speak, and that is because in their nature *salāyatana* require the Self, they are not just 'static' organs. However it will always remain impossible to actually 'find' any of those *yatanas*, in that active sense. (And *expecting* to be able to find them is nothing but *upādāna*.) That's why Ven. Ñāṇavīra said that senses can only appear reflexively, and that which appears in reflexion is *the salāyatana* (that 'image', that 'thought'), which you *assume* to be the material organs.

As for the conscious body, that's all there is to it—it is conscious. Everything that is bound up with the body, everything that depends on it, speech, action, movement, needs, etc. is *bodily*, belongs to the body paired with consciousness. And the same goes for any *intentions* you might have

in relation to the body, they are all bodily and crudely put—it is your body that intends, and performs all those things. It's just that when you appropriate the body (as a phenomenon closest to you, in the arising of the world as a whole), you end up appropriating (and thinking you are doing) all the things that the body does. This, however, is only possible to see through the authenticity—i.e. *after* the full responsibility for every little act has been taken.

Regarding the second part of your letter: Both 'internal' and 'external' are *out there*. 'There' structurally precedes both 'here' and 'yonder'.

To answer simply (bear in mind my answering paragraph above): when one's (conscious) body *internally* is appropriated, the name-and-matter *externally* are *contacting one*. 'Corresponding conscious engagement' is an *ignorant determination* which brings these two together. Thus one structurally (not temporally) appropriates material senses *which are conscious*, 'before' one is contacted (again, 'before' in a structural sense), as a result of which eye-and-forms (internally, 'here') 'come together' with (name-and-)forms externally, 'yonder'. One 'unites' them, so to speak, and that 'unison', that *singular* center, that solid base, is nothing but *phassa*, nothing but one's sense of conceit.

You wrote: "Sorry for the digression, but sometimes it can be hard to remain silent." Don't worry about digressing at all. The practice of Dhamma has to be personal, otherwise one is not doing it right. As far as people around you go (mother, father, friends and relatives) if you think they won't be able to understand what you are going through (which they probably won't), don't feel pressured into trying to explain it to them. However you will have to give up the desire to be understood *by them* (or someone), and this is not necessarily easy. And often, even if they insist on knowing, it's actually better for them if they don't. I would personally just give them a general picture, a hint of what is going on, but not give up too much, so that their anxieties would lessen, not increase, but at the same time not cause me extra hassle.

I'm also including a short document I very quickly recently wrote down, while I was contemplating *phassa*. The reason why I'm including it is because it is very relevant to what I just said above.

'Meeting' of the eye and forms (and other senses) should be distinguished from 'coming together' of them. Meeting of the eye and

forms is an occurrence 'below' one's immediate experience. 'Coming together' of the three however means 'merging' of the eye, form and consciousness, 'blending' means *uniting in one, singular* phenomenon—*contact*. It is that singular thing, that unison, that *center* of the experience (where things *come together*) that is one's Self, one's 'I'. Contacted one perceives, feels and intends. Hence, *I* feel, *I* perceive, *I* intend. This means that things can actually 'meet' without 'coming together', without being *identified* as one—things can arise without one's Self. 'Contact' is that unified center of the experience, it is the place where one is 'touched' by the phenomena, and that 'touch' is the result of the *ignorant* 'meeting' of the three. Because it is ignorant, the distinction between the three is not known, thus they all merge and unite. Without ignorance, meeting remains just that—meeting, superposition of three different things. The distinction is known and as a result of which the ground (distinction-unknown) is removed and thus 'coming together' has no *place* to occur.

[M. 158]

14 March 2013

Thank-you for your letters. They were helpful. While I could certainly make a lot of comments, I would like to restrict myself to questions (at least in this letter).

1. You wrote: "You cannot 'create' or 'invent' or 'originate' anything, *whatever* you experience (material, mental) is *given beforehand*, or *simply there*. You always *find it*, and that is sufficient for it to show you that you are not the master of anything."

I agree. But when you say 'you', *what are you referring to* in more 'technical' terms? I always *find* things, but what is 'I' here?

2. "As for the conscious body, that's all there is to it—it is conscious. Everything that is bound up with the body, everything that depends on it, speech, action, movement, needs, etc. is *bodily*, belongs to the body paired with consciousness."

The body is 'conscious' or 'paired with consciousness', but what does that mean? The word 'conscious(ness)' is not very clear to me here.

3. “Thus, one structurally (not temporally) appropriates material senses *which are conscious*, ‘before’ one is contacted (again, ‘before’ in a structural sense), as a result of which eye-and-forms (internally, ‘here’) ‘come together’ with (name-and-)forms externally, ‘yonder’.”

You speak of ‘eye-and-forms’ as being ‘internal’ or ‘here’. Why is eye-and-forms internal and not just the eye as opposed to external forms? (Apart from that the two first questions also apply, i.e. ‘who’ is the ‘one that appropriates’ in more ‘technical’ terms and what does it mean when material senses are ‘conscious’?)

4. “Meeting of the eye and forms is an occurrence ‘below’ one’s immediate experience. ‘Coming together’ of the three however means ‘merging’ of the eye, form and consciousness, ‘blending’—means *uniting in one, singular phenomenon—contact*.”

How does consciousness come into play here? I mean if we discern eye, form *and* consciousness, *what* do we discern in the case of ‘consciousness’?

5. This letter might appear quite dry or even a bit ‘impersonal’, but at this point I want to avoid any additional confusion, so I just gathered the main questions. I hope this is alright. But let me assure you that your replies (including the document on *phassa*) had an impact on me that goes far beyond ‘questioning’. You actually describe parts of what I experience better than I can do at the moment.

[N. 95]

19 March 2013

1. It is that which is *peripheral* to that which is *found*.

2. The body is *intentional*, not ‘you’. And it is because the intentionality is *inherently not yours*, freedom from appropriation is possible.

3. What I mean here by saying eye-and-forms is that *conscious body*.

Your ignorance of the impossibility to actually appropriate things is that which appropriates things. Or, since you don’t know that which you assume (hence you assume it), that assumption is ‘all you have’, it is real, it exists.

4. Consciousness is the *manifested presence* of the phenomenon. The fact that you can say ‘there is presence’ means the presence is manifested.

When that presence *ceases to exist*, consciousness becomes ‘non-indicative, non-manifested’.

5. I see exactly what you mean. That’s why I also kept it concise.

[M. 159]

29 March 2013

Sometimes there is intense anxiety (as if ‘death’ is just one step behind) but also a kind of ‘foretaste’ of a possible relief. But this just comes over me (no control), like a gentle and uplifting wave, which I would describe as ‘sweet’, making the body light. One just wants to ‘fall into’ it and be ‘carried away’ by it. Even right now it is in the background. It is similar to a kind of ‘tiredness’, i.e. it ‘invites’ one in a similar way.

Unfortunately this is not a substantial answer to anything you wrote in your last letter. I think I will need some more time to formulate some questions or comments. Nevertheless your essays were very welcome.

[M. 160]

30 March 2013

I have trouble to adapt to both of your latest essays. At least partly this might be due to use of words: ‘Perceiving perception’ for example. Perhaps you just mean that whatever I find, *already* has a ‘name’. Somehow my understanding is that the ‘names’ *are out there together with the ‘matter’*. So even *before* I actually see something, it is already *certain* that this thing will have a colour, because otherwise I wouldn’t be able to ‘find’ it to be ‘there’. One does not discover ‘bare matter’ first in order to *give* it a name afterwards. There is nothing to be found without a ‘name’, so *finding is not naming*. Finding comes *second* (structurally), it is *later* and therefore *powerless*. ‘Coming too late all the time’ would be a nice description of my current experience. So ‘perceiving perception’ might just mean ‘finding the named’. Would this be a correct reading of what you wrote? The problem is the role of the senses here. Do they *name* or do they *find*?

[N. 96]

30 March 2013

Yes, 'names' are out there together with 'matter', but right here when you say 'out there together with 'matter'', that is another thought, which means that it is perceived, which means that it cannot *stand* for that which is 'matter', so all you can truly say is 'names are out there together with names', or simply 'name' is there. But then you can discern that if there is *no matter* to be named, this 'name' could not arise. On the other hand if there is no 'name,' that because of which 'name' is there ('matter'), could not be discerned. Hence name-and-matter.

Assuming that *that thing* has a colour '*before*' you perceive it (find it), means assuming the external existence of that thing regardless of the experience. When you perceive a thing, when you find it, indeed it appears as *already having a colour*, but that doesn't mean the same. No matter what a thing ('matter') might be outside of your perception, you can never know anything but your perception (and feelings), which means that 'matter' 'outside' is *inconceivable*, so when you have a thought of a *thing-being-something-unknown-outside-of-your-perception*, that thought is *perception*; and with it you are *conceiving that matter* as that which is conceived, that 'matter' comes to exist.

Does this make it a bit clearer?

[M. 161]

2 April 2013

Unfortunately I don't think it's much clearer now. As far as I can see there is no perception outside the context of eye and forms, ear and sounds, etc., i.e. matter is inconceivable outside that context. Is *that* what you mean? Apart from the 'engagement' or 'involvement' of the senses with matter, the latter doesn't have a name, i.e. it does not appear in one's world or better: it is not constitutive of one's world (nor of a 'world' *behind*). But this requires one to understand the senses not as 'organs' (because organs belong to the world) but as something 'engaged' or 'involved' *by their nature*, i.e. what the senses *are* must be distinguished from *how they appear* in one's world. The latter would be *optional*.

[N. 97]

2 April 2013

You wrote: “As far as I can see there is no perception outside the context of eye and forms, ear and sounds, etc., i.e. matter is inconceivable outside that context. Is *that* what you mean?”

Yes, that’s more or less what I am saying. However, what I am also saying is that when you say “matter is inconceivable outside that context,” you *conceive it* with that thought—hence all you can ever perceive is your perception, and by realizing this, *your senses* will cease to exist.

That which is ‘engaged’ or ‘involved by their nature’, is indeed there—as *a thought*—and as such, it is *perceived*, so it cannot *stand for* that which is ‘engaged’, because of which sight is there, namely—your eyes. If you think: “this which is my eyes is just a thought so it cannot stand for that which is my eyes,” although you see that *that* thought cannot be that which is your eyes, by thinking “...so it cannot stand for that which is my eyes,” you still *assume* those eyes *somewhere*. What needs to be seen is that *this* assumption ‘*of somewhere*’ is *another thought*, and so on. The point is all you can ever think is a thought, so the assumption of the internal senses, *that thought which is being perceived*, means that it cannot possibly ever stand for anything more than itself—hence that which is assumed to be the internal senses ceases to exist, since you realize that no matter how far you go, that thought can never step outside of itself.

The distinguishing of *what the senses are*, and *how they appear* in one’s world, are *both* pertaining to that world, both are *perceived*.

[M. 162]

7 April 2013

I just want to let you know that I am unable to reply. I tried many times, but somehow your last essays and the related letters seem to be ‘different’. I cannot adapt to them and the way of stating certain things (‘perceiving perception’).

But apart from that, the already mentioned ‘zombification’ of mine is still going on. And something seems to be wrong with that. I’m no longer willing to accept this as an ‘attainment’ or ‘progress’. Even in his last

words the Buddha said: “Strive with earnestness!” Since I’m not an *arahat*, the attitude of “nothing can be done about it” does not suit me. If the Buddha said ‘strive’, it must be possible to do so. And by that I don’t mean to ‘ponder even more’. In my case striving means to practise (more) restraint/meditation *regardless* of doubt, confusion and paralysis. I have to *exercise control* in order to get me out of that mud. Until a point is reached where the pressure is finally gone. And if *at that later point*, the ‘I can’ also passes away, I will be okay with it but not any time earlier! The current ‘I can’t’ must be Māra.

I’m sorry for this intellectually unsatisfying letter, but I think that I have reached the upper-limit of insight that I am capable of—as an *unrestrained* person. I’m not talking about moral wrong-doing here, but I’m a worldly person, indulging in sensual pleasures and distractions every day.

I think you know what you are talking about in your essays and letters, and *partly* I am able to verify this, but you don’t live as a monk for no reason. And as far as I can see, I have every reason to make some major changes into that direction too. Not becoming a monk tomorrow, but gathering myself and doing some ‘real work’.

Thank-you for your understanding!

[M. 163]

12 April 2013

In your latest essay *Determining Determinations* begins with:

“Feeling, perception and consciousness are always there together. It is impossible to have them arising independently and on their own; when there is one, the other two are present as well. They do not pass into each other’s domain: one feels one’s feeling, one perceives one’s perception, one cognizes one’s cognizance.”

I just don’t know what you mean (it actually makes me see red). Who is ‘one’? If no subject is to be found, who is the ‘one’ you are talking about, who feels *his* feeling, perceives *his* perception and cognizes *his* cognizance? And what about this strange use of language: Feel feeling, perceive perception, cognize cognizance? Why not say that feeling is feeling or feeling is present? Why introduce a feeling of feeling, a perception of perception, a cognition of cognizance? And what about Ven.

Ñāṇavīra who said that consciousness is presence and that there can be no consciousness of consciousness, but you nevertheless say that ‘when there is one, the other two are *present* as well’, i.e. why isn’t consciousness the presence of the other two?

Please forgive my ignorance and frustration, but I can’t read your latest essays without getting stuck with such details. So far this is a big hindrance, a big obstacle and makes reading it a pain, because there seems to be no common ground to begin with.

[N. 98]

12 April 2013

Reply to the letter of 7 April 2013:

No need to worry about the “intellectually unsatisfying letter.” The mental strength (obtained through the thorough development of sense restraint) is not an optional matter. One can have the clearest understanding of the Teaching, but without the mind strong enough to develop it in the way that needs to be developed, one cannot expect great progress.

Make sure you take it one step at the time, and when you do make a step, make sure you *stand your ground*.

Reply to the letter of 12 April 2013:

‘One’ is a *designation* for an individual that feels, perceives and cognizes. If that ‘one’ is assumed as *mine*, it becomes ‘Self’. So, saying ‘one feels one’s feeling’ could be said ‘feeling feels’, since that’s all that that individual is (feeling, perception and consciousness).

I think you might have misunderstood the bit on “feeling the feeling.” Feeling the feeling, or perceiving the perception, is *not* the same as saying ‘feeling of feeling’ or ‘perception of perception’, and that’s where the crucial difference is. You *feel* the feeling, you *perceive* the perception—this is to be understood in an *active sense*, ‘feeling’ [present continuous tense] the feeling [noun]. The same goes for the perception and cognizance.

“The other two are present as well,” i.e. the other two can be known, discerned—they are *there*. And they can only be there if they are present. Consciousness is presence, but not in a neutral, almost abstract sense, but

in a *cognitive sense*—hence ‘cognizance’. (Think of it as a ‘direction’.) So when you say ‘consciousness is the presence of the two’, *that* consciousness does not *stand for* that *present cognizance*, thus you *conceive it*. Try to learn how to *feel*, without *assuming* that that which you feel is the *same* (or *different*, or *both-same-and-different*, or *neither-same-nor-different*) as that which you *perceive*. Try to feel *while* perceiving without *identifying the two* (in ‘sameness’ or ‘difference’). Try not to try to perceive your feeling and feel your perception, but feel that which is felt and perceive that which is perceived.

I am aware that the latest essays are somewhat different. It might change in the future, but at the moment I am emphasizing the ‘leading on’ aspect of presenting my descriptions, as opposed to explaining things. It makes them much harder to read, and not many people will bother, but those who do will hopefully see what I mean. Anyway, I’m sorry for the frustration they are causing you. As always, feel free to ask any further questions that arise.

[M. 164]

15 April 2013

At the moment I cannot move further regarding the content of your latest essay(s). But regarding the topic of restraint and mindfulness I would like to ask/say a few things:

To make the effort is quite a paradox for me, because I am not sure of the one who is ‘doing’ it. Somehow I need to ‘assure myself of myself’ first —‘*against all odds*’, so to speak (which is quite painful, since doubt wants to take over). This is a bit strange, because I cannot really say what that actually means, but it’s like *stopping the ‘autopilot’*. In a way this is the only time when ‘I’ or ‘freedom’ really exists, and it’s also the only time of actually being ‘conscious’ or ‘awake’ or ‘lucid’. But that state is without ‘substance’ and quite ‘fragile’ (which might be the reason for ‘doubting’ it). Nevertheless, in my case, it seems to be the only escape, so to speak, because everything else is ‘not mine’. It’s like a tiny, flickering spark of wakefulness in a thick and sticky nightmare.

While it might be wrong to regard ‘that’ as oneself, I need to do so, otherwise nothing could be done about the misery (at least in my case). I

have to be the ‘executor of the Dhamma’—just that. The one on the raft. Without even that, there would be no hope and no escape (at least for me).

You say: “One can have the clearest understanding of the Teaching, but without the mind strong enough to develop it in the way that needs to be developed, one cannot expect great progress.”

Do you refer to a ‘lazy *sotāpanna*’ here? Or what does ‘clearest understanding of the Teaching’ mean here?

You say: “Make sure you take it one step at the time, and when you do make a step, make sure you *stand your ground*.”

I think this is very important, because it is my weak spot: I make a step, but after a while I go back again—like a pendulum. I live alone and rely heavily on the Internet and (less strongly) on the TV in order to get some pleasure. I would almost say that the Internet comes directly from Māra... You find anything you want in abundance (except real Dhamma). A huge part of the problem is the easy access. You press a few keys/buttons, make a few clicks and the screen is your ‘heaven’. How would you cope with such a situation as a layperson? What would ‘take it one step at the time’ look like? Perhaps you were in a similar situation before becoming a monk...

[N. 99]

29 April 2013

Regarding the third paragraph: And you should be the one who ‘executes’ the Dhamma. It is that ‘I’, that ‘one’ that you eventually *disown*, not deny.

In terms of the sense restraint, it is hard for a monk, even more so for a layman, for whom all of the things are, as you say, very easily accessible. There is not much that can be said about it, one either restrains (is strong enough to take the pain of sensuality) or one doesn’t (is not strong enough, at that time, to take the pain of sensuality so he gives in). In this way practice of restraint builds mental strength, the more one restrains the stronger one becomes, but also the ‘load’ that one can/has to restrain increases, which means that the risks of breaking down increase too (if there is no understanding helping out). Taking one step at a time means exactly this, not rushing ahead, but *bearing in mind* that one has to go

forward. Once one decides to make a measured step *one sticks with it*, despite all odds. And so on.

That's why one has to recognize how far one can go in a given situation, i.e. as a layman. If one is satisfied with it, that's fine, but if one wants more, then one has to see that a change of the environment (i.e. conditions) is necessary.

Don't worry about asking these types of questions, they are no less important than the intellectual ones. If there are other things you want to know about becoming/being a monk, please don't hesitate at all.

I am planning to move to Sri Lanka after the *vassa* this year. That's probably November, early December. It's still in preparation and uncertain, but unless something unexpected turns up, it should happen.

[M. 165]

30 April 2013

Regarding becoming a monk: I have a mild skin disease. At my last appointment with a dermatologist, I was still a child and as far as I can remember, different doctors said different things, so I'm not sure what it *really* is, but I think it is psoriasis. In other words, I seem to belong to the persons "afflicted with leprosy, boils, eczema, tuberculosis, or epilepsy."⁵⁵ According to the commentary, my skin disease comes either under 'leprosy' or under 'eczema' (they explicitly mention psoriasis and things like ringworm). And they further say that 'if the patches are visible on the face or the backs of hands, then even if they are small and won't spread, he shouldn't go forth.' So it seems that I'm 'not qualified'.

That is ... disappointing. But if it is true, I have to accept it. I have no intention to 'sneak in' by the goodwill of others if it actually would be their duty to refuse me. But if you know more, I would like to hear it.

If I understand you correctly, you want to live in Sri Lanka for a longer period—not just make a 'visit'—is that correct? I hope that everything happens in accordance with your plans. I think you will no longer be available then (or at least much less so).

Regarding your essays: I wonder how they relate to the six elements, because thinking in terms of these seems to be easier for me, at least currently. What I mean: Are those elements also 'indifferent' to each

other, just 'superimposed' but not 'merged' (I mean the triad of four great elements/space/consciousness)? It seems that none of the elements can be manifest on its own also.

[M. 166]

10 May 2013

I need your advice, since there is no-one else in my environment who seems to understand the problem. As you certainly know, I have lived on a disability pension for many years now. Mainly because of my anxiety. Now I looked again at my correspondence with the authorities at that time and I found some 'exaggerations' on my part in order to 'convince' them of my inability to undergo certain measures, i.e. stationary 'psychosomatic rehabilitation'. The truth is that I never saw my anxiety as a medical problem, so I never saw a point in psychotherapy. And a *stationary* one would have been even more stress. But instead of pointing this out clearly to the authorities, I used the *anxiety* as my main excuse for being unable to undergo such a measure (instead of saying that I don't see the point and don't want to take the trouble). While the anxiety certainly also played its role here, I avoided to tell the blunt truth, which might have resulted in a denial of my pension request.

But now I see this as a mistake. And since I receive real money from them every month, I see it as a very serious mistake.

I think the correct thing would be to write them a letter and point out my wrongdoing and to let them decide what to do now. But I'm quite sure that they won't understand. I tried to point it out to my mother, but she seems to think I've lost my mind... Perhaps I have. But if I acted blamelessly in the first place no such worries would be necessary.

I would like to know your opinion. I cannot rely on others here.

I think this is similar to a job interview where you pretend to like the job when in fact you don't. This is lying.

I am very desperate...

[N. 100]

10 May 2013

What was the *main* and *first* reason for not wanting to undergo therapy—fear or views?

Either way, if you feel like you might have made a mistake of inauthentically over-emphasizing certain aspects (that were nevertheless present) in your situation in order to get the pension, you could simply ask them to re-evaluate your case and see if you are still entitled to the money you are receiving. This time, of course, you would take extra care in presenting all aspects equally (that's including those which are in favour of the pension—people sometimes, when they discover they were inauthentic, go too far the other way).

[M. 167]

10 May 2013

Thank-you for your fast reply. It is very much appreciated! What I have to say now might sound very strange, but it seems that I was in an *altered state of mind* when worrying about these things to such an enormous degree. It came over me very unexpectedly and fast yesterday. And it left me during the last hour or so. My body felt different also. It was heavy, tired and painful. I know this feeling from the past. And I can't help but calling it 'possession'. A psychiatrist would perhaps call it a 'psychotic episode'. It creeps in almost unnoticed, makes one feel strange and is related to oneself in a way that leads to one's harm (despite the fact that one might think one is 'special'). One is not oneself in that state.

Yes, I made the mistake of inauthentically over-emphasizing certain aspects, *but that doesn't mean that I'm not in need of that pension*, because I *really* have all these issues. They don't even know about the voices and episodes like this one and it's already enough for them to give me the pension. The outcome of acting according to this 'possession' would have been loss of pension, humiliation and embarrassment, despite the fact that I would *still* have that mental disorder and the need for money. Who could want this? Greetings from Māra or just some evil spirit (or just call it psychosis...).

Isn't that a horrible thing? You think you are in control and then 'someone' or 'something' makes you act like an idiot.

The good thing is that one *can* notice it, but in my case it was always too late, but I think it must be possible to do this earlier, because one actually feels different. As I said: One is not oneself in that state.

Bhante, I somehow fear 'further progress'. I seem to be very prone to 'attacks' like that. I don't want to end up as someone who thinks he is awakened when in fact he is just insane. It's not just seeing 'ghosts' or hearing 'voices', it is also about being a vessel for *someone else* or someone else's *thoughts*. 'They' are able to force a *mood* and certain *thoughts* on you. And if you 'accept' them as yours, you are in real trouble.

My morals are not bad enough to make them convince me to murder someone, but I have no doubt that people took pistols and knives under 'their' influence, killed other people and then, after the 'possession' is over and the strange 'mood' and 'thinking' left, they no longer understand how *they* could do this.

But just in order to answer your question: You asked: "What was the *main* and *first* reason for not wanting to undergo therapy fear or views?"

Generally speaking it was the related (possible) *displeasure*: I didn't want to leave home, I didn't want to meet other people and I didn't want them to take my blood (because of my fear of passing out). My *views* about psychotherapy alone wouldn't be strong enough to 'revolt' against them.

I'm sorry for bothering or even confusing you with my own confusion.

Thank-you for being around!

[M. 168]

10 May 2013

Now I feel the same pressure to ponder about these things. I'm sorry for the ups and downs. I think the point is that I *made* a mistake. So even if there is some 'external hostile force', it couldn't bother me if I had not actually failed.

I would like to mention that I'm in the process of simplifying my life, e.g. I have rearranged my apartment to bring me closer to a monk's lifestyle. And perhaps it is no coincidence that I feel the pressure to think critically

about mistakes with regard to my pension at this time, because I want to be ‘pure’.

You said: “you could simply ask them to re-evaluate your case and see if you are still entitled to the money you are receiving.”

I think that is actually a good idea. But the problem is the money they have already given to me. Perhaps I would have never received it in the first place had I been ‘authentic’. So shouldn’t I point out my mistakes to them also?

Whether all this is ‘psychotic’ or not, I want to clear the air in order to be able to live in peace. But I think it must be possible to do this *skillfully*—in a way that causes as little damage as possible.

[N. 101]

10 May 2013

What you are experiencing is *doubt*, which can be a very strong force and can send you oscillating from one end to the other.

Provided you have originally presented them with all aspects of your situation (regardless of the inauthentic emphasis on certain ones), i.e. provided you didn’t *lie* to them, the inauthenticity will concern you only. (Which in a certain way makes things seemingly easier, but on the other hand provides a very fertile ground for doubt swings.) As you said, you are *in need* of a pension, and if attending to the stationary ‘psychosomatic rehabilitation’ was an absolute requirement, they wouldn’t have accepted you as someone who can receive their financial support.

Nevertheless, since you now think that you might have over-emphasized the debilitating aspect of your anxiety (which at the time you were not fully aware of doing—the near possibility of even greater fear makes one easily perform an act of bad faith), you can ask them to reassess your case again, and you can tell them that due to fear and concern for your situation worsening (if you had to go out) you now believe that you stressed the point of anxiety perhaps too much. If because of that they think that you shouldn’t receive any more money, that’s fine, it’s up to them to decide what they want to do.

The most important thing is to *now remain authentic*, and not give in to doubt-swings completely, i.e. to believe it’s all bad, and you have to throw

it all out (you are aware that you need their financial help), or believe that it's all fine (if you are aware that it would be good to let them know that you acted out of fear).

[M. 169]

10 May 2013

Perhaps you should also know that receiving a pension *was not even my own idea* in the first place. I just followed *external* advice. The employment agency suggested it. I personally never cared much who gives the money to me. Perhaps this also makes a difference...

The pension is actually quite small, and I receive additional money from the social assistance office. Without that pension, *all* my money would come from the social assistance office, so I wouldn't 'die' without the pension. The total amount of money which I would receive monthly would be the same—with pension or without pension.

What also bothers me is whether the donations I made are now useless or even harmful. I donate a certain amount of money to a monastery every month. And I now fear (or 'doubt') that this money might be 'dirty' (at least partly) because the authorities *might* have rejected my application for the pension *if* I had been authentic. These thoughts are almost 'killing' me. It really burns. This problem appears to be the worst one actually.

The real problem here is your suffering caused by the doubt. No, the money and offerings you made are not dirty nor harmful. “If I had been authentic... if I hadn’t... what if...,” are all attitudes that you can *now be authentic about*, and by that I mean take responsibility for them and don’t allow them to throw you around, from one end to the other. Yes, you could have been more careful back then, but it is *now that you know that* you could have been more careful back then, which means that since you didn’t know it back then, you couldn’t have been more careful at the time. (Of course this is not avoiding the responsibility (since you were responsible for not-knowing it back then), but it is bringing the responsibility back onto you *right now*, where it is the only place and time that it can apply.)

You know that you didn’t want the money, or that you would be given it anyway from a different department, you just have to use that knowledge to *withstand* the attacks of doubt. Responsibility can be very unpleasant, and it is fundamentally *you who decide* what is going to move you or not. It will cause you some amount of pain, but ultimately it will make you rely on yourself, rather than external circumstances and conditions (relying on which is the real cause of one’s suffering).

If by ‘purifying the whole situation’ you mean all is fine—it isn’t, and that’s what you are taking the responsibility for, and if you think that now all is bad—it isn’t, and that’s what you are taking the responsibility for. In other words, you have to *develop* your own peace, not depend on the circumstances. You’ve seen the extent of your mistake, you will strive to prevent it from occurring in the future, but that doesn’t mean that that mistake never happened. If it torments you, you need to develop your authenticity (mind) further where that cannot happen anymore.

Don’t expect 100% purity to be able to come from anything but your own mind.

[M. 170]

15 May 2013

I'm quite sure that a psychologist or psychiatrist would call the current problem a 'delusion of guilt' or something similar. And they might be right, at least insofar as it had a 'strange feel' to it. While I was thinking what to do in order to clean up the mess I allegedly caused, I finally had to ask myself whether there is such a 'mess' at all. I now looked back into the 'application form' of the pension and what is written there with regard to my health situation at that time. And if I don't try too hard to actually *find* fault, the description is *accurate enough*. So what is it that I want to 'confess'? That it wasn't 2013 back then? And it's quite similar with my rejection of stationary therapy. While I *should* have been more careful, I can actually see that I *tried* to be careful, despite some dishonesty. But the *overall picture* is that I rejected the stationary 'treatment' for the same mental health problems that are mentioned in the 'application form' as reasons to give me the pension.

[N. 103]

20 May 2013

How are you now? Are the swings of guilt still present?

The more you progress in *dhamma*, the more intense experiences like this become (when they arise), so don't think that you shouldn't have them *because* you are practising the *dhamma*. The more intense the experiences are, the stronger the mind gets, until eventually the mind cannot be overwhelmed by them. The *dhamma* undoes the inauthenticity, which means that, without those defense mechanisms of bad faith, you are more 'exposed' to whatever arises. This is necessary, since the presence of bad faith covers things up and the nature of their arising is obscured.

Also, you should try and stop regarding Māra as Self too, regardless of how he appears.

I now try to see things more positively: After all it is a *good* thing (a sign of progress) that I clearly see my past mistakes. MN 61 says:

“Also, Rāhula, after you have done an action with the speech, you should reflect upon that same verbal action thus: ‘Did this action that I did with the speech lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both? Was it an unwholesome verbal action with painful consequences, with painful results?’ When you reflect, if you know: ‘This action that I did with the speech led to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it was an unwholesome verbal action with painful consequences, with painful results,’ then you should confess such a verbal action, reveal it, and lay it open to the Teacher or to your wise companions in the holy life. Having confessed it, revealed it, and laid it open, you should undertake restraint for the future.”⁵⁶

What I did led (at least) to self-affliction, I confessed it (to you, to my mother) and I try my best not to make such mistakes again. But, not being a monk, I wonder *whether it is enough* to confess it to you (‘the Teacher’) or whether I should also confess it to that department *in order to meet the standard of that Sutta?* But the Sutta also says:

“Whenever you want to do a verbal action, you should reflect on it: ‘This verbal action I want to do—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Would it be an unskillful verbal action, with painful consequences, painful results?’
If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful verbal action with painful consequences, painful results, then any verbal action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do.”

So writing a letter of confession to *them* would be one thing but, if written carelessly, it might do more harm than good.

Another point is: A mistake remains a mistake, whether confessed or not. So even if they would ‘forgive’ me, I would still have the feeling that the money I receive is not pure. Apart from that, I no longer want to depend on social benefits (I am 32!). This should be the last resort. While my mental problems are grave and certainly justify such kind of support, as long as I’m not a monk, I *should* try to make money within the limits of my capabilities. Today we have the Internet, so even a person like me can *at least try* it, without being forced to go out, meet a lot of people and do hard manual labor. And I think it is better to invest the stream of incoming ‘impure’ money in getting rid of that ‘impure’ money than just keep receiving it. (I refer to the money as ‘impure’ because that is how I *feel*, regardless of what others say. It is dirt for me.) But the *best* thing would be to become a monk. I think I clearly see that. But I do not feel ready. I still feel too weak. And I still don’t know whether my skin condition would prevent it anyway.

[N. 104]

3 June 2013

I’m glad to hear that MN 61 helped you see things more clearly.

I think it is fine if you just confess it to me, which you have already done, since we have established that the department (by being a department) will not be able to relate correctly to your ‘confession’.

You wrote: “Apart from that, I no longer want to depend on social benefits....” It’s a good idea, it won’t be easy, but trying to work and become independent can certainly strengthen you. In terms of your skin condition, if in the future you feel ready to take a step into monasticism, if your skin issues prevent you from receiving the full ordination, you can still live as a *sāmaṇera* in a monastery, for whom there are no such requirements. If you do have any other practical questions regarding the monastic life, don’t hesitate to ask.

[N. 105]

3 June 2013

I've just found out that in one of your previous emails you mentioned that your skin condition is most likely psoriasis. If that is the case, then it probably wouldn't be a problem for the *upasampadā*, since psoriasis is not contagious, which is the main factor for all the diseases that are listed as a disqualifying factor.

[M. 172]

4 June 2013

Thank-you for both of your letters. They help me to bring my worries regarding the pension (and also the monkhood) to an end.

[M. 173]

10 June 2013

I noticed that I cannot prevent the arising of the burning and piercing unpleasant feeling that comes up in relation to my past wrongdoing regarding the pension. The point is that I don't have to actively promote thinking in that direction. It's like a *wound*, which makes itself known again and again by causing pain, reminding me of my mistakes. It seems that this is just *kamma-vipāka*. It seems that *without* my attempts to purify myself, that pain would not be there *now*.

I can find some peace by just looking at the pain and reminding myself of the fact that my efforts to purify myself were a success (with regard to ethics), otherwise that mistake might have passed unnoticed or would have been downplayed (something I actually tried to do without much success).

The difficult part is *to do nothing*, i.e. not to add pressure, not letting the feeling overwhelm myself. I cannot say that I'm good at this. But if I remember correctly, the Buddha said that one cannot escape the consequences of one's actions and that they *have* to be felt, either now or later. So better now...

[M. 174]

18 June 2013

Instead of the department, I contacted a lawyer (specialized in social law) regarding my mistakes and the pension. According to him (he also explained why), my pension is legitimate, regardless of my mistakes. Not the tiniest doubt on his side. That needs to sink in.

I think the idea to ask a specialized lawyer *first*, was definitely a good one. It cost me a small amount of money, but this money is well spent.

As I said, I need some time now to digest what he said. Doubt is cruel.

[M. 175]

22 June 2013

Thank-you for the reply. *Regardless* of the lawyer's opinion, I wrote to the department. While now the basis of *this* decision became the *new* object of doubt, I *nevertheless* feel better, because the pain of (perhaps) having unnecessarily contacted them is not as severe as the pain of (perhaps) hiding something important from them.

I somehow have the intuition that only becoming a monk would free me from this kind of doubt or better: it would *oblige* me not to indulge in such kind of doubt any longer, because it would no longer be my business.

[N. 106]

25 June 2013

Unfortunately, ordaining will not free you from these kinds of doubts, on the contrary. While the 'content' of the doubt might be different for someone in the robes, the actual ordeal you were (are) going through is quite a common occurrence, certainly in the beginning of one's monastic life (or sometimes for even much longer, depending whether one has achieved some distinction or not). That is because with all of the restraint imposed by the rules, and all of the aspects and possibilities that one might have done wrong, things get intensified and the result is quite irrational, yet very real and unpleasant doubt.

[M. 176]

4 July 2013

Today I got the answer from the department. It was very short. They basically said that the pension was granted after medical examination because of my lack of working capability, and that the rehabilitation thing was no decisive factor here. That's all. No consequences. No reassessment. Nothing.

[M. 177]

27 July 2013

In one of my former letters I wrote that I want to try to become independent from social benefits by earning my own money, but I find that this is not 'my way'. In the end I have to become a *bhikkhu* or stay with the pension (as long as necessary). What is the right livelihood for one person, might be the wrong livelihood for another.

Right now there is a very strong urge to end suffering. I really mean an existential urge (like when seeing a murderer coming for you—no time to philosophize, you just need to escape as quickly as possible).

Just recently, while making a phone-call, my mind stopped working and I could no longer talk as I wanted. As if something was broken. This apparent utter lack of control triggered a panic attack (I was also thinking of possible brain damage, etc. which made the anxiety even worse).

I also had a dream where I was part of a small group of people, who tried to escape a beast. We could hear the beast roaring in the distance, searching for us. We had to separate, i.e. each of us had to escape on their own. Luckily I knew a safe place, where the beast couldn't follow. (I had similar dreams in the past, where a flood was coming from all sides with apparently no escape, etc.)

I really want to be free once and for all. In addition to upholding the precepts, I have already stopped any sexual activity. I realize that old-age is slowly advancing. And I also don't know how long my body/senses will be in good-enough shape to support me. It's unpredictable.

The amount of anxiety that comes up when facing that abyss without any filter is unbearable. So I think one's struggle for liberation should be

proportionally strong. But one needs to know *how to* in order to direct one's energy.

While I know *in principle* what to do, I'm unsure how to proceed practically. Upholding the precepts and sense-restraint (step by step) is one thing, but I'm not sure how to apply mindfulness properly.

I feel a resistance against a narrow focus, because that is like hypnosis. The experience is a *singular* 'thing'. I feel safer when I try to encompass that 'whole' instead of leaving something out. But I'm not sure whether this approach is actually the right thing to do, and how it can be reconciled with *ānāpānasati* for example.

Perhaps it is possible for you to say something about that?

[N. 107]

7 August 2013

Don't worry about trying to 'apply' mindfulness correctly. When you keep the precepts and practise the restraint you are mindful, even if it doesn't seem that way. (We all have preconceived notions of what mindfulness is, and it is these notions that need to be 'upgraded', i.e. mindfulness understood.)

Ānāpānasati is something you *do*, and that's all one has to worry about. You *do* breathing, as you would do some woodwork, or sweeping or anything repetitive. You only have to make sure that you remain aware throughout the repetition, and that's it, because when you are aware of breathing as something you do, that which is body there, *is the body*; that which is feeling there, *is the feeling*; that which is mind there, *is the mind*; that which are thoughts (images, *dhammas*) there, are *the thoughts*. In *ānāpānasati* you choose to breathe, as opposed to letting it happen while you are unaware of it. You don't observe any *particular* points of your breath as many contemporary 'techniques' do, you are aware of it as an *act*: act of in-breath, act of out-breath, and so on. You also refrain from letting your mind pursue 'answers' and explanations of what is happening, you rather just remain with what you do, namely—breathing.

Thank-you for your answers. Regarding the Pāli: If I remember correctly, you translated some Suttas, so I was thinking that you ‘know it’. You say: “but nevertheless, it would most certainly be worth the effort to learn it, if one has energy and time to invest.” While I would *like* to, I fear that I *don’t* have the energy and perhaps also *not* the time.

Just recently I suffered from a very unpleasant tachycardia attack which nearly knocked me out (in bed at night). I think that such situations are a good opportunity to measure one’s progress. And I wasn’t satisfied with mine, to say the least.

It is very hard to restrain myself from indulging in certain sensual pleasures. I am ‘mindful enough’ to see what I *should* not do, but I still do it. So I’m very mindful of *failing*, so to speak, but there is a *lack of energy*. What I want to say: I have *devalued* sensual pleasures as a whole, i.e. I can no longer tell myself that these things are ‘no problem’ or ‘harmless’, but I can’t live according to that. So I live a *contradiction*. I enjoy what I myself regard as ‘to abandon’—out of *weakness*, not out of affirmation.

It is like driving a vehicle. You realize that you should stop. Then you step on the brake. But the vehicle doesn’t stop. So you drive while stepping on the brake. You still play games, you still listen to music, you still watch TV, you still seek sexual enjoyment, but at the same time you regard these things as something you should not indulge in, because you clearly see that there is *no value* in them, they are worthless. You cannot build an affirming view around them. You have ceased to be a ‘romantic’. So it seems that there is some sort of *blockade* here. How to stop living this contradiction?

Thank-you also for your advice on *ānāpānasati*. To be aware of an *act* one *does* is certainly different than being aware of an *object* one (just) perceives. So it seems that the outcome of such different exercises would also be different.

You said that one *does* the breathing. Just to make sure that I didn’t misunderstand you: Does that mean that one actually tries to control/influence the breath when doing *ānāpānasati*? Or does it just mean to be aware of something one is *doing* anyway?

I have a question which is rather basic: I frequently disinfect my hands and also use mouthwash in order to avoid certain health problems by *destroying microorganisms*. Now the question is whether this is an act of killing (similar to pest control) that would come under the first precept.

[M. 179]

24 August 2013

After a period of massive heart problems, I reached a point where I was reduced to a bundle of anxiety, with apparently no way out. It was *now or never*. I sat in my bed and *rejected (not denied) everything*. I was able to perceive all the things I was unable to restrain myself from so far, through the lens of my heart problems and upcoming death. Nothing enjoyable remains (including the hope that things will get better, so that I can go back to my normal lifestyle). I mentally renounced the world. It was a fight. But when it was over, there was a kind of peace.

Nevertheless: While I no longer can enjoy (the enjoyment of) sensual pleasures, the next heart-attack would still scare me, so there is something deeper which cannot be renounced in the same way. So I asked myself the question: What to do *now*? It occurred to me that *only now* was the right time to practise mindfulness/*samādhi*, because *if* you have mentally renounced the world, what else can you do?

I think I lamented in the past over the fact that I cannot practise meditation properly. Now I see the reason: I had not mentally renounced the world. It was still interesting to me, still exciting, and there was still something to do and to achieve. Yesterday I was able to do *ānāpānasati* over many hours (perhaps not perfect, but still...). A certain calming effect was noticeable. ‘Suddenly’ I had the time and the interest to do it...

Strangely, my heart seems to work normally again, but these things are unpredictable. I think as soon as my mind is stable enough, I should ordain (provided I don’t die before).

[N. 108]

26 August 2013

Reply to the letter of 7 August 2013:

No, you don't have to worry about the disinfectant and micro-organisms. Don't think of it as killing them, but more of suppressing them (which is basically what we are doing, since they are there all the time, it's just a question of keeping their extent under control, lest we get ill).

In terms of sexuality and sensuality, you asked how to overcome the contradiction. You do so by *disowning it* (which is done through understanding it). One can know and see the danger of the senses but, as long as the mind is not developed to the extent of not being moved by these bodily 'pulls', one can give in to sensuality. Think of sensual cravings as *belonging* and *originating* from the body (since they are), and the question is not not-having them, but not being overwhelmed by that body that wants pleasure. (Remember the simile that the Buddha gave regarding the senses: they are like five animals, each of them pulling you towards their own feeding ground. The point is in conquering them, which is done through the development (of the strength) of one's mind.)

Reply to the letter of 24 August 2013:

It's not necessarily control or force regarding breath, though sometimes it might seem like it. Think of it as whether one breathes by controlling one's breath, or one breathes by not trying to control it—one is *breathing*, i.e. there is *an action* being performed in either of these cases, and *that's* one's main concern. If controlling your breath for a period of time helps establish the mindfulness of *your action of breathing*—that's fine. What is not fine is when people (usually into yoga or some other 'spiritual' pursuits) practise breath control, force, stop, etc. in order to *obtain* certain bodily or mental experiences (read: pleasure) or some other forms of mystical absorptions that they are inevitably pursuing. Nor is it fine when people are just 'bearing witness' to their breath. Both of these cases fail to grasp the phenomenon of action that is right there in front of them, *while they breathe*. So again, whether you control it or not *you are doing it*. Whether you are aware of it or not *you are doing it*. Once this is established one can progress and see the inherent impossibility of *one* actually doing anything. But that's a different story.

I'm sorry to hear about your heart problems, but then, it goes without saying that illness is pretty much inevitable for all of us. It's good that it is sending you in the direction of dispassion. In order to overcome one's

senses one has to overcome the fear of pain and dread that arises when the senses are pinned down (i.e. restrained). If that pain cannot overwhelm one's mind anymore, there is *absolutely nothing* that senses (read: Māra) can do to access one. And this is done through the development of mind (I mentioned it a while ago in my previous letter.)

What did the doctor say about your heart? Were you prescribed any medications?

[M. 180]

26 August 2013

I'm still determined to 'succeed'. This life shall not be in vain. Restraint was never so easy so, in a sense, my former letter regarding the restraint no longer applies in the way it formerly did. I have already removed TV, etc. from my home. And this computer is no longer for entertainment. All the possible enjoyment of pleasures depends on the assumption of being 'safe for now', of having 'enough time' (to enjoy).

I fear that I'm a very special case, regarding my mental situation, so I did not visit a doctor. I'm not sure whether I can explain this to you. For a few times I was more or less on the verge of calling an emergency doctor, but this would mean all the more displeasure.

While I'm not a doctor, I have some background knowledge and diagnosed myself and drew some conclusions (change of lifestyle). The Ven. Ñāṇavīra seemed to have similar problems (extra systoles), but not to such an extent. I had a lot of *salvos* of them. If you take a very large meal and then lay down (perhaps on the left side), you might have them too (I do not actually recommend that experiment). The heart then begins to beat between normal beats, sometimes missing beats, sometimes beating extra strong (to compensate for the missed ones) and sometimes there are no more normal beats, only what feels like repeated cramps or rumbling. According to my investigation, these things are harmless, provided the heart is structurally normal, i.e. not damaged (like after an infarct). Some people seem to have tens of thousands of such irregular beats per day and yet doctors usually do 'nothing', provided the heart is otherwise healthy. As I found out, the medication that *can* be used can itself cause dangerous arrhythmia. And the last resort is an electroshock

under narcosis, which is supposed to bring the normal rhythm back—no option for me.

So if doctors cannot do anything for me which I could actually *accept*, I see no point to see them. I now take magnesium and eat more healthily. As I said, the problem is pretty much gone—as is my trust in this body.

During the last days I did *ānāpānasati* for many hours (I actually tried to do it continuously in all postures), which seems to have a calming effect on the heart too. *This* is my last resort.

There is a wonderful Sutta (SN 47:20), which describes my current situation. It is short and I will quote it here, hoping that this is acceptable for you:

“I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was living among the Sumbhas. Now there is a Sumbhan town named Sedaka. There the Blessed One addressed the monks, ‘Monks!’

‘Yes, lord,’ the monks responded.

The Blessed One said, ‘Suppose, monks, that a large crowd of people comes thronging together, saying, ‘The beauty queen! The beauty queen!’ And suppose that the beauty queen is highly accomplished at singing & dancing, so that an even greater crowd comes thronging, saying, ‘The beauty queen is singing! The beauty queen is dancing!’ Then a man comes along, desiring life & shrinking from death, desiring pleasure & abhorring pain. They say to him, ‘Now look here, mister. You must take this bowl filled to the brim with oil and carry it on your head in between the great crowd & the beauty queen. A man with a raised sword will follow right behind you, and wherever you spill even a drop of oil, right there will he cut off your head.’ Now what do you think, monks: Will that man, not paying attention to the bowl of oil, let himself get distracted outside?’

‘No, lord.’

‘I have given you this parable to convey a meaning. The meaning is this: The bowl filled to the brim with oil stands for mindfulness immersed in the body. Thus you should train yourselves: ‘We will develop mindfulness immersed in the body. We will pursue it, hand it the reins and take it as a basis, give it a grounding, steady it,

consolidate it, and undertake it well.’ That is how you should train yourselves.’⁵⁷

I’m like this man with the oil bowl now. Actually: I even feel in danger while writing this letter, since it distracts me from doing it. “The man with the sword” is there all the time.

I think the actual meaning of what the Buddha said (for example the meaning of this parable), reveals itself only in situations where it can actually apply in one’s life. Otherwise one just reads it, but it is not real for one. One might think: How is it possible to do this? *It is possible, namely when “a man with a raised sword will follow right behind you”!* In my case that man came in the form of ‘heart problems’. It’s time to prove now that awakening is possible within a time-frame of seven days to seven years. Whether one does *ānāpānasati* or not, I think the point is the *continuous effort* of being mindful. And, as far as I am concerned, this is only possible when in danger, which does not allow for any (other) escape.

Perhaps this would be a nice method to teach meditation: Knowing that a device sends a bullet through one’s head as soon as one ceases to be mindful ...

Unfortunately, doubt and confusion arise while I meditate. They try to convince me *that I cannot make the effort*, because of reason X, Y or Z. The problem is that I have no other solution than making the effort *nevertheless*. In other words: I have no *arguments*. My only ‘argument’ is acting *regardless of them*. Trusting that the clarity will come *later*.

Do you think this is sufficient? Or should I try to find arguments? These doubts are actually very silly: They range from “You are not calm because of *ānāpānasati* but because of the magnesium tablets.” Or “There might be a hidden mechanism behind the experience which controls everything, so you can’t do anything.” Yes, I’m a philosopher with a certain depth of understanding, but these doubts present themselves in a way that is ‘irrefutable’. So whatever argument I bring up, they say: “It could *still* be otherwise, the whole logic of your argument is faulty,” etc. *So I see no other way of convincing myself of being able to act than by acting.*

After re-reading your letter about *ānāpānasati*, I'm actually no longer sure whether I'm doing it right or wrong. I certainly don't practise breath control, but it seems that I 'just bear witness', which (according to your letter) is 'not fine' also.

I understand that watching one's heart beat is something different than watching one's breath. I also understand that watching one's actions is always (in a way) *self-regulating*. Because it allows for modification. So I think that watching oneself breathing will always lead to an effort to breathe in a more pleasant way, which seems (in turn) to be a kind of breath control... So I'm not sure what to do.

Another thing is: While I can still act, it seems that I can no longer be the subject. Because whatever I do is always already under observation, and my attempts to 'observe' are nothing but making my activities visible/known *within* that field of observation which is not mine. In other words: My actions appear somehow as modification *within* the experience or world, which is not mine. But at the same time this alien field of observation seems to be the only way to know myself.

Regarding the gradual training in the Suttas, I don't know what this means (e.g. MN 107):

“When, brahmin, the bhikkhu is moderate in eating, then the Tathāgata disciplines him further: ‘Come, bhikkhu, be devoted to wakefulness. During the day, while walking back and forth and sitting, purify your mind of obstructive states. In the first watch of the night, while walking back and forth and sitting, purify your mind of obstructive states. In the middle watch of the night you should lie down on the right side in the lion’s pose with one foot overlapping the other, mindful and fully aware, after noting in your mind the time for rising. After rising, in the third watch of the night, while walking back and forth and sitting, purify your mind of obstructive states.’”⁵⁸

How does one “cleanse the mind of obstructive mental states”?

[M. 182]

27 August 2013

Perhaps it is useful when I describe what I am actually mindful of when I watch the breath. I don't try to observe the breath at any particular spot. Nevertheless the breath seems to have a *center*. This center seems to be located somewhere in the area of the mouth or a little lower, but this must *not* be understood as anatomical description. Because what I actually observe is *not* a point of contact between a part of my body and the *air* that comes either in or out. 'Air' doesn't play a role here. It is more or less the *origin* of the breathing *movement* that I observe. It is the *effort* that is made, and a *resistance* that is felt.

It seems to me that any other aspect of breathing does not concern the breathing itself. For example: I could watch my abdomen rise and fall or the air touching the nostrils, etc. but these things are not the breathing for me. They are just 'related'.

So I actually might be doing it correctly. But if you think that something is wrong, please tell me.

[M. 183]

4 September 2013

Just to let you know: I still live restrained (as never before in my life): no TV, no games, no music, no excessive reading—using mainly the breath as my anchor. (I no longer care so much whether I'm doing it right or wrong.) Heart situation is acceptable at the moment. I use the Internet only for checking e-mails and gathering some information (mainly Dhamma-related), but afterwards I have the impression that even this was a waste of time (except for your e-mails). It seems to me that even those who seem to know the Dhamma (the Suttas) waste their time.

The temptation to 'go back' to my old life is there from time to time, but if one has looked into the abyss deep enough (which I have now), it is not convincing. Doubt/confusion is still there. For the moment I have to trust that this will go away and do what I do regardless.

[N. 109]

6 September 2013

I don't have much to say here (I will address your previous emails about *ānāpānasati* later). Be patient and see what comes out of it. Whatever the course your action might take, make sure you keep it within the precepts—eight or five respectively.

As for the doubt, even that too, you just have to wait and endure patiently through it. Doubt takes for granted that it needs to be addressed, or sorted out, or alleviated, but that's actually not always the case.

[M. 184]

6 September 2013

Since you want to address my previous e-mails about *ānāpānasati* also, I thought it would be appropriate to inform you about a(nother) change of attitude towards the breath. I was never quite sure whether I attend the breath correctly, and also the breath itself changed in its appearance. Especially your remarks about *doing* the breathing are still not really clear to me. Nevertheless: I decided to let the phenomenon of breath manifest itself as it 'is'. It still doesn't appear as an actual doing to me, but *that* is the way it is. If one sits still, for example, the breath is almost the only bodily movement, so I just wait for it to show up as it 'wants'. At the moment, this is the *most authentic* way for me to breathe.

[N. 110]

6 September 2013

In a way, yes, the breath shows up the way it wants, one has no control over it. However the fact that one can choose to stop breathing at any time, means that breath is a form of action performed. A form of action that one *keeps doing*, albeit non-mindfully most of the time. How voluntary the breath is, is a different matter, and that is what one is supposed to see. The fact that breath shows itself the way it wants, *regardless* of how much one *does it*, gives a hint of how even the most voluntary action is fundamentally outside of one's reach. That's what I mean by 'doing' the breathing.

[M. 185]

6 September 2013

I fully agree that breathing is an action in the sense that one can choose to stop or manipulate it. But if I *don't do that* it seems to me as if it goes on automatically and is only *open* to manipulation—whereas the heart for example seems to be *fully* enclosed 'out there' in its functioning, i.e. *not* open to (direct) manipulation.

A few days ago I had a 'glimpse' that the experience does *not* depend on me (subject) but on 'something else', namely the senses. And because the experience does not depend on me, that which it depends on (the senses) is 'out there', beyond reach, i.e. it is material. So the whole experience has (in a sense) nothing to do with me. It depends on something, which I cannot control.

This is also in line with the occurrence last year, where the senses 'left me' (I wrote about it). And in that short moment, there was 'something' *beyond loss*, so to speak (instead of the rest, which is *beyond control* and will be lost), but words can hardly grasp it. But this I begin to understand better only now (at least I think so). But that was a digression.

Perhaps I mixed up the doing of the breath with its (in)voluntariness. At the moment I see no way to change my way of doing *ānāpānasati*. The breath often comes to my awareness by itself, i.e. I don't have to look at it first. It makes itself known, so to speak. Perhaps this is because I have practised earlier.

Another question: I mainly practise *ānāpānasati* with eyes open. Does this matter?

[N. 111]

6 September 2013

There is no need to change the way you practise *ānāpānasati*, as long as when you do practise it, you are practising mindfulness of it (whether it feels as if it is automated or not, is secondary).

And, no, it doesn't matter at all whether you have your eyes open or shut. As a matter of fact it's probably better to have them open. (Better in the sense whereby one puts one's mindfulness of the breath 'in front' or

‘to the fore’ as the Sutta says. This is harder to accomplish with the eyes closed, though essentially it doesn’t matter that much).

I thoroughly agree with what you wrote: “And because the experience does not depend on me, that which it depends on (the senses) is ‘out there’, beyond reach, i.e. it is material. So the whole experience has (in a sense) nothing to do with me. It depends on something, which I cannot control.”

[M. 186]

9 September 2013

Thank-you for the reply. Regarding mindfulness of the *body*: At the moment I’m not sure whether it would be best to do *ānāpānasati* all the time or better to switch to another object at times, i.e. when walking or washing the dishes. I regard continuity of the practice as most important, but the question is how important is the *object* of mindfulness here? Should one dedicate different times/postures to different objects of one’s mindfulness? Or should one mainly be mindful of the most noticeable object at a certain time, whatever that may be? (Still talking only about mindfulness of the body here.)

Generally the perception of my body seems to have changed to more pleasurable (lighter, softer, pleasant feelings in certain areas, but not stable). But at the same time, I see ‘erotic content’ almost everywhere, which can be a bit disturbing.... At least I can say that I can see that sexual feelings are actually painful, despite their pleasantness. Not sure how to state this correctly. It’s never enough. You want to see more and more of that nonsense. It demands action on your part. I understand, as the Buddha said, that the female body is Māra’s perfect trap.

But I’m not going to fall back. I remember only too well the pitiful situation when my heart went amok—and how wretched I would feel after ‘going back’. No way. In that sense it’s a good thing that I have so much anxiety. It prevents me from doing very stupid things (however much an obstacle it may be otherwise).

It seems that, at least for the moment, I should focus *solely* on *ānāpānasati*—in all postures/situations. The reason is my *health* (heart) plus the amount of anxiety present. I can’t think of any other ‘method’ that also

supports bodily health and a peaceful state of mind. You may correct me here, if you think that I'm wrong.

[M. 187]

11 September 2013

Regarding sexuality: There is a Sutta (SN 4:25), where Māra's daughters manifest themselves before the Buddha in various seductive ways, e.g.:

“Men's tastes are diverse. Suppose we each manifest ourselves in the form of a hundred maidens.”⁵⁹

In the case of the Buddha that was of course pointless. But they also said:

“If we had assailed with such tactics any ascetic or brahmin who was not devoid of lust, either his heart would have burst, or he would have vomited hot blood from his mouth, or he would have gone mad or become mentally deranged; or else he would have dried up and withered away and become shrivelled, just as a green reed that has been mowed down would dry up and wither away and become shrivelled.”⁶⁰

While I cannot say that I'm surrounded in the form of “a hundred maidens” nor that Māra's daughters are after me, I'm *not* devoid of lust and those few which actually surround me, do so almost constantly and can appear in a way that is *painfully seductive*.

My advice to myself would be: Don't look and don't think about them (as far as this is possible). Stay with the object(s) of mindfulness. And (of course) don't break the precepts, i.e. no sexual activities. Is there anything else?

While I'm writing this, the description of sense-restraint in the Suttas comes to my mind:

“On seeing a form with the eye, he does not grasp at any theme or details by which — if he were to dwell without restraint over the

faculty of the eye — evil, unskillful qualities such as greed or distress might assail him.”⁶¹

This might appear somewhat cryptic at first, but I think I can understand it more clearly now. Because the seductiveness of what I see often lies in the *detail*. And the more time one spends looking at these details, the more desire arises. So I suspect one should be quick as soon as one realizes that one is, or might be, in danger.

Sometimes I do something not so nice and mentally ‘slaughter’ these women, so that I can see their bodies as ‘empty puppets’ or ‘set of senses’ instead of persons. This is not easy, but it seems that the Self of another is necessary to give rise to desire. And *vice versa*: they, in their attempts to disturb and seduce, assume *my* Self.

[N. 112]

11 September 2013

Be careful not to overthink and over-doubt your experience now, in a similar way you did with the pension issue (sooner or later there won’t be a lawyer [or similar *external* source] to clear the unpleasantness for you). In other words, restraint is as much for the thought as it is for the senses.

You mentioned in one of the previous letters that it is your *eye*, *nose*... and so on, that want the pleasure and the excitement of sensuality. And it is. The senses remain attracted to the corresponding ‘feeding grounds’, regardless of one’s understanding, but it is through the development of mind that this doesn’t affect one any more, i.e. one is ‘stronger’ than them. That’s why the Buddha said that through the development of mind, lust is abandoned.

So don’t look and think of them and build yourself up to experience the pain of restraint whenever it wants to arise. Also, don’t try too hard in ‘staying with the object’ of mindfulness, since such attempts would simply confirm that sensuality moves you. (In other words, one can give in or reject the senses, either way it will be on account of being moved by them. There is a MN 25 called Nivāpa Sutta, ‘The Bait’, that in the very beginning talks about this.)

Be mindful, practise restraint, don't expect the pain to miraculously disappear, but strengthen yourself in regard to it, so it simply *doesn't hurt any more*. The pain is sharp, unpleasant, threatening, but *not permanent*. One develops one's mind through seeing this. Meditation (in the form of developing mindfulness) speeds up this process—that is, phenomenologically seeing one's action of breathing is particularly good. If you have to attend and do things be aware of the bodily postures and when sometimes even that fails, see the body and the senses as someone else you have to live with, whom if you restrain and keep under control is your friend. If not, it's the worst enemy.

[M. 188]

12 September 2013

Thank-you for your reply. I agree with what you say.

I found the Nivāpa Sutta and read it (again). Nevertheless, I'm not sure whether I understand you here. Do you mean that—instead of giving in (first herd)—one isolates oneself from the sense-objects with the help of the meditation object, thinking that one *should not be attracted* by those sense-objects, while in fact, as you say, the senses *remain* attracted *regardless* of one's understanding?

So would it be enough when one acknowledges 'attraction is there' (instead of *wishing* or *expecting* that it should be absent) and then move on with one's meditation? So the 'warning sign' for oneself would be when one begins to 'condemn' the sense-objects for being attractive, or oneself for being attracted to them? That's my interpretation of what you said.

You said (underlining mine): "Meditation (in the form of developing mindfulness) speeds up this process—that is phenomenologically seeing one's action of breathing is particularly good."

How can I be sure that my meditation is "phenomenologically seeing"? I mean generally speaking, not just in relation to the breath. Or what would be a wrong meditation in that sense? Is the difference between right and wrong the difference between 'being aware of what is' and 'trying to reach/eliminate'? For example: I can be aware of breathing, however that might 'feel', or I can focus on the breath *in order to shut off* the world, *reach jhāna*, etc.

I already asked this question in a former letter, but I want to repeat it in case it was lost. The Suttas talk about ‘wakefulness’:

“And how is a bhikkhu intent on wakefulness? Here, during the day, while walking back and forth and sitting, a bhikkhu purifies his mind of obstructive qualities. In the first watch of the night, while walking back and forth and sitting, he purifies his mind of obstructive qualities. In the middle watch of the night he lies down on the right side in the lion’s posture, with one foot overlapping the other, mindful and clearly comprehending, after noting in his mind the idea of rising. After rising, in the last watch of the night, while walking back and forth and sitting, he purifies his mind of obstructive qualities. It is in this way that a bhikkhu is intent on wakefulness.”⁶²

What does that actually mean? How does one purify one’s mind of obstructive qualities? I wonder, because this step is also mentioned *before* the application of mindfulness-and-full-awareness within the gradual training (MN 107):

- virtue
- sense-restraint
- moderation in eating
- wakefulness
- mindfulness-and-full-awareness.

Without knowing what it means or how it’s done, it’s hard to guess whether one’s own practice is complete here. So perhaps you can say something about that (meaning and order)?

Yes, your understanding of the Nivāpa Sutta is correct. When a person gets a hint of a danger of the sensual pull, they usually shun the whole picture away. This inevitably results in returning to those sense objects sooner or later when the inspiration/motivation runs out. The sensual objects are not the problem, it is the lust in regard to them. Indeed, one first has to acknowledge that the attraction is there, and then develop one's mind in regard to it. By this I mean, let the attraction or the pull arise to *the extent that it wants to arise*, not interfere with it. This takes time to develop, and simple physical restraint is a first step towards it.

Being intent on wakefulness will work only once the right view is in place (that still doesn't mean that one shouldn't be trying to be wakeful). In simple terms, it means that one *knows* skilful from unskillful, i.e. has a right criteria to judge this (is a *sotāpanna*), and then not entertains anything unskillful, regarding body, speech or mind. Wakefulness, in this sense, means a monk is not relenting in his efforts of surmounting and getting rid of his *avijjā*, whether he sits, walks, talks, goes to sleep, etc. But, as I already said, the only way to do this right is through understanding the Suttas (i.e. what the Buddha's teaching aims at).

Regarding your questions on meditation, I'm including here a text I recently composed as a reply to Nick. It addresses the very questions you were asking. Let me know what you think.

* * *

Q.: Does 'manifested mind' mean the same thing as the presence of 'mind' as a phenomenon?

A.: Yes.

Q.: Also AN 1:51 (the basis for your article 'The Infinity of the Mind') says that the *puthujjana* does not understand the luminous mind as it really is (i.e. for him the mind is not manifest as a phenomenon) and so for him there is no development of mind (*samādhi*).

A.: Exactly.

Q.: So, the development of mind requires that we see everything as phenomena—even the rather nebulous notion of ‘mind’. In SN 47:8 we have: “That wise, competent, skillful bhikkhu gains pleasant dwellings in this very life, and he gains mindfulness and awareness. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, that wise, competent, skillful bhikkhu picks up the sign of his own mind (*cittassa nimitta*)”⁶³

A.: Again, yes. However, “seeing everything as phenomena” should be understood in the sense of ‘rediscovering’ things as phenomena, recognizing them for what they are, in the way they arise. Things are phenomena, it’s just that our views and assumptions prevent us from seeing this. And that nebulous notion of the mind is a phenomenon as such: nebulous, ambiguous, vague and abstract.

Q.: So, what is *cittassa nimitta*? The sign of one’s own mind. Mind as a phenomenon that is now present as such. Is this what you’re getting at?

A.: Think of it as seeing the nature of a phenomenon, whichever is present. That means grasping the sign of one’s mind.

Q.: Seeing generals rather than particulars?

A.: Not quite. It’s seeing generals while the particulars are present. The point is not to see one on account of the other (when you do, then those generals become the focus of your attention, hence they become particulars, and something else is then general), the point is to understand their relation to each other. Hence *saṅkhārā/saṅkhatadhamma*. The point is to see that upon which this directly stands, as impermanent and suffering. When you do, then automatically, this ceases to be regarded as mine, as myself.

Q.: Seeing things in terms of the five khandhas?

A.: Yes, since that would mean as still seeing that particular thing that has arisen, only you would be seeing it as dependent upon something ‘bigger’, more general, not yours, such as ‘earth, water....’, or feeling (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral), perception (blue, red...), intentions, consciousness (six of them). It is this plurality of these fundamental things (that are just there), that removes the notions of singularity—i.e. me and mine. If the singularity was fundamental there would be the Self (or God).

Q.: Seeing the nature of things rather than just the things in themselves?

A.: Yes.

Q.: Seeing things as signs rather than following after those signs?

A.: Seeing things as signs, and seeing following of the signs as sign.

Q.: *Seeing what appears as it has appeared without assuming that there is somehow ‘more’ behind it?*

A.: Seeing the assumption of something more ‘behind’ as being *in front* or, instead of ‘before’, see it as ‘after’, in the sense that it cannot be separated from *that* ‘behind which’ it is—i.e. it is determined by it. (By the way, correcting this order of ‘in front’ or ‘after’ is what is meant by ‘uprooting’ in the Suttas. It’s not just a figure of speech.)

Q.: *Am I right in thinking that “one who sees things as dhammas” can be applied to the puthujjana phenomenologist?*

A.: Yes. Obviously there are different degrees of this.

Q.: *How does ānāpānasati help one to see things as dhammas?*

A.: Seeing things as *dhammas*, or seeing one’s mind, means seeing the experience as a *whole*. When you practise *ānāpānasati* that’s what you do—through breathing (i.e. doing something) you see the experience of that doing and your body, the *whole thing*, as *being there*, in the world, *while* you are breathing (and the Buddha praised the breathing as something to do in this practice because it is non-distracting, and utterly neutral in itself, i.e. neither wholesome nor unwholesome). That’s how meditation contributes to seeing your mind. When that phenomenon of your mind is clearly established and unwavering, you are establishing your *samādhi*, and you don’t have to be sitting crossed-legged for this. (When you are mindful of the *whole*, as a phenomenon *there*, anything that arises *within* that, i.e. a particular, won’t be affecting you—your mindfulness will be uninterrupted.)

This is why there is no room for a ‘technique’ in this. Doing a technique means trying to use a particular performance, or methodology so that things would somehow ‘arise’ as phenomenon (or whatever the meditator expects to see). This already implies a wrong view, namely still giving the priority to the non-phenomenal objects in one’s world (sensations, doing this then that, staying, moving, softening, expanding, addressing bodily parts, etc., etc.). Even if the phenomena are somehow seen after this, they are *secondary* to the non-phenomenal methodology, which means that the *nature* of the *experience as a whole* remains unseen.

Experience as a whole, where the sign of your mind is, is *already there*, *given*, regardless of whether you perform certain things or not. Believing

that going through the set of motions or things ‘to do’ is the way of seeing the experience as a whole, means *not seeing* that experience as a whole, and not knowing where to look for it either. Believing that going through the set of motions and actions is *the practice* of Dhamma, is *sīlabbataparāmāsa* (i.e. believing that you can *act* your way out of *action*).

(Not-knowing that the things are *already there*, you do a technique, trying to reach those things that are *already there*. Since the experience as a whole is already there, doing a technique to reach it, means that it is not just redundant, it also implies not-knowing where the experience as a whole is to be found. In this way the (belief in the) technique obscures seeing the nature of the experience as a whole and, as long as you are doing that technique (i.e. maintaining your belief), you put the nature of things out of your reach—you are responsible for your *avijjā*.)

Whether you choose to stay with the breath or not, breath is *there*. Establish your awareness of *that* and you have surmounted your particular choice of breathing. (And if you fully understand it, you have *uprooted* it—uprooted the action.) That’s how *samādhi* (i.e. the establishing of the mindfulness correctly) *aids* understanding. It ‘aligns’ things the way they fundamentally are, when you *recognize* that, you have *understood* it. Then your *understanding* keeps the *alignment*, and *alignment* carries your *understanding*. There is *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

[M. 190]

10 October 2013

Your replies to Nick on meditation were clarifying. Apparently I also had wrong view of *samādhi*. Nevertheless I seem to have *practised* it correctly regardless—up to a certain extent that is.

I did *not* fall back into my old ‘unrestrained’ life. I’m determined to succeed. My understanding of certain matters seems to improve. You could certainly help me, but it’s not easy for me to clearly point you to the problem. So I will just bring up different matters...

It seems that I can now understand better what happened to me in that night over a year ago: When in the seen there is only the seen, the seen cannot reach ‘one’: the ‘internal eye’ has ceased. In order for contact to occur, the seen must be ‘connected’ or ‘brought together’ with the

internal eye. But since the internal eye is not to be found in the seen (actually it is not to be found at all), this contact can only occur when the seen is connected with *that* thing where the internal eye is assumed to reside. And that is one's body (especially one's head), which here refers to the phenomenal body or the body-in-the-world. And this body is a product of the other senses, mainly the sense of touch (and also the mind).

So *simultaneously* with the seen, the objects of the other senses must be present (here one's body or head) and then the seen is connected with that 'object' where the internal eye is supposed to be 'in', namely 'the head'. Without that connection, the seen points to nothing, but the other objects can nevertheless be there, but *disconnected*.

But what seems to have happened in *my* case, was *more*: All the *non-visual* senses *really ceased* to work, i.e. all *non-visual* phenomena *really disappeared*, and *because of that*, the *seen* disappeared too. And for one moment (I tried to resist in fear, but in vain) ... I can hardly explain it. 'Something' was there when *everything* (including *me*) was gone, i.e. as far as 'removal' or 'vanishing' can go, it was accomplished, but 'it' was nevertheless 'there'. But in a way that *could not be mine*. I was not there, and yet there was 'it'. I will come to that again a little bit further down in the text...

What I want to say first is: The experiential structure 'body-in-the-world' *requires* that the senses operate *simultaneously*, whether they are 'connected' (*phassa*) or not. So I have to disagree with Ven. Ñāṇavīra again that visual experience *alone* (in the case of one eye as the only sense) would be describable in terms of forms (from which the eye could not be distinguished). I say: It would be the *end* of description.

Back to that moment when everything ceased: Can you tell me what 'it' was that *was there* after the cessation was complete?

I called it 'The Unborn'. But since yesterday I think that it might have been an 'encounter' with death, i.e. Māra. Before I continue, let me add (and I have already told you in past letters) that the aftermath of that experience was an inner peace (which I never knew before) that lasted for days, if not weeks (slowly fading away). So it definitely was 'something'. But what? (By the way, it would certainly fit nicely into those path-and-fruit-moments-scheme of the Abhidhamma.)

With regard to *death*: I just mentioned that my understanding changed yesterday. It seems, people often think of death (not dying) as a kind of *nothing*. So there is *nothing* to fear, they sometimes say. But when death comes, things can look very different, for death is not nothing. It is that on account of which you can come to an end, i.e. it is that which comes to *displace* you, to establish a present which is not yours but *his* (Māra). People don't see that there can be no end of them (subjectively) with *nothing* 'thereafter'. So to say that there is nothing after death is to say that there is *no* 'after death' and therefore no death (end) at all. So Death or Māra, when he approaches and begins to dissolve your world is actually a *massive* thing, *utterly suppressive*, like a 'mountain'. It is something you try to *resist*, which shows that it's *there*. Some people might seek their own annihilation and therefore seek death (make it easy for Māra), but this doesn't change the fact that death is not nothing. You can't be absent (or end) without something else filling the gap, making a present without you. But this has to be understood *subjectively* and *not* objectively in the sense of "When I die, the world remains."

This has consequences for my understanding of what liberation actually is. Here I refer especially to *parinibbāna*, i.e. what comes after the 'death' of the *arahat*. If one doesn't understand Death or Māra, one will either think that 'my world' or 'my life' or some aspects of it will somehow continue, however subtle, or one will think that one will be 'dead (annihilated) once and for all'. But according to my new understanding, Death or Māra will indeed come to take away what is *his*, but when he comes, he is unable to find one. So liberation here means 'Māra-unable-to-find-one'. Death (as such) will be there but unable to reach/find one (in the same way that 'life' could not reach one before, i.e. forms, sounds, etc. could not contact one).

So perhaps I just understood 'death' in that night... What do you think? I'm aware that what I have just said might appear strange, but I think you will understand the essence of it.

I just decided to let this be enough for now, so other letters might follow. I hope this is OK for you (but please don't wait for them before you answer this one).

[M. 191]

11 October 2013

I think I can answer my own question, at least partly. I think what happened was already implicit in my description of what happened in that night. When the senses and their objects cease, that which is ‘in *between*’ eye and forms, etc. is no longer ‘stuck’ there, no longer *limited* by these two ends. So I think it was the *element of consciousness* (or space, or both?) *unmanifested*. There was neither light nor darkness. So I think it was neither ‘The Unborn’ nor was it ‘Death (Māra)’, but in a sense it was related to both. Perhaps you can make a comment?

What I said about death in my last letter was perhaps a bit ‘over the mark’.

Earlier this day I ate some eggs. Afterwards I crushed parts of the remaining shell with my fingers. And somehow I understood that they broke because they *can* break. And since eggshells are matter... Matter is ‘breakable’. This understanding was rather shallow and perhaps not really clear, but it was nevertheless related to the nature of things.

[M. 192]

16 October 2013

Perhaps you don’t need to answer my last two letters (but, of course, you can if you want). The reason is that (as far as I can see), there is *only one real problem* to address in my case. But as I said in my second-last letter: “You could certainly help me, but it’s not easy for me to clearly point you to the problem.”

I’m not sure how/where to start. Or whether my problem is ‘common’ amongst those who aim/strive for liberation. It might be best to see what I say now about this problem as *provisional*, as an *attempt* to get there.

It is as if my real life (the ‘Mathias in the world’, so to speak) only takes place *at the periphery*. It is *there*, but it is, in a way, *not ‘convincing’*. It *leaves open* the possibility of all those nasty sceptical scenarios, like *predeterminism* or a non-phenomenal ‘source’, etc. I think you know what I mean here. The problem with these scenarios is that none of them allows for the Buddha’s Teaching to be true and practicable. And that certainly says quite a lot about them. A skeptic might actually *like* to play with the

possibility of such scenarios, but I suffer on account of them. The problem is (as it seems) not lack of arguments, but the fact that things themselves are present in that ‘doubtful’ way. So throwing arguments against them is not of much help and certainly a sign of not wanting things to appear in that way. All this would not be such a grave problem if it were only about things but not oneself. But it includes ‘me’ as well. In other words: I and my abilities to ‘fight’ this condition are also ‘not convincing’. So even if you say: ‘Fight’, or ‘Don’t fight’, the receiver of that message is not ‘sure’, not beyond doubt also. There seems to be no solid basis for anything.

It somehow seems that a lot of Buddhists have only ‘real’ or ‘rock-solid’ suffering. They are perhaps ill, or have lost someone. That’s concrete. It has substance. I am there. The world is there. Suffering is there. It’s all there. Then the Buddha is there and says ‘come’. Then they practise. And if they have doubts, then their doubts are about something ‘real’. They never seem to doubt what they see, hear, etc., i.e. their experience. The world is solid. I am solid. No problem. I just don’t know how this or that point must be understood, but that’s no problem, since all this is solid and an explanation will point out my mistake and remove my confusion. Do you see what I mean? Even in the Suttas, the people only seem to have ‘real’ problems. Not that I don’t have such problems too, but these are only included in *the* problem that cannot be grasped. You can’t step out and look at it. I don’t know any example from the Suttas where someone like me approaches the Buddha and talks about that ‘diffuse nonsense’ about which I have talked with you.

As far as I can see, liberation cannot come from me. If at all, it will be the Dhamma, which liberates. I only act ‘as if’ I could act—if that makes any sense. I carry out the instructions given by the Buddha and you. But not being sure of anything at the same time, and yet without alternative.

Can you help? (The problem is not new, as you will perhaps notice.) The question what I should do is somehow absurd, because it rests on the assumption that there is a world beyond any doubt, in which all this is possible. It’s not there. Not for me.

Perhaps the only solution is to restrain my thinking regarding “sceptical scenarios and their refutation” in the same way I restrain my acting and thinking from sensuality. But the problem is: Both the sensuality and the possibility of those sceptical scenarios are still there, regardless of the

restraint. An *arahat* does not need to restrain himself like this. So what must be done?

I don't know to what extent I already have 'right view', but there must be a point where things are clear beyond any doubt, and by that I mean a clarity which is in the *things* and not in a 'view' that is superimposed on the things in order that they look nice and harmless.

[N. 114]

21 October 2013

Thank-you for your letter. Let me be concise here since that might actually be more helpful:

When it comes to skepticism and scenarios, try *seeing them as just being there*, whether you try to *do* them or not. Do you see what I mean here? There should come a point where one drops the compulsion to *do something* ('practise the Dhamma' too). One sees things are fundamentally outside of one's mastery over them, and one also sees that *doubting* this is also *outside one's mastery*, i.e. one disowns one's own doubt, which means nothing but that that doubt ceases to apply and pull one anymore. This is the point where things become clear, when doubt makes no difference to them (doubt included) *simply being there*. Also one 'drops the compulsion' by repeatedly seeing that compulsion as something included (or 'dependent upon') that which is out of your control. It may take a while before the actual pressure of the compulsion disappears.

My impression (and I might be wrong here) is that you see to an extent that things arise of their own accord, but at the same time you are unable to let go of the desire 'to make something out of that', to 'benefit from it', to 'attain the freedom from suffering'. It is because of this desire that suffering is still *yours*. As I said, this is just what I gather from your emails, and it might not be the case at all, so please feel free to correct me if I'm wrong.

My problem is that I don't see 'the one' who could 'drop' or 'let go' or 'see' that something is 'outside his mastery' or 'just being there'. 'I' cannot 'be' this 'one'. Neither as part of phenomena, nor beyond. So how could this mass of suffering be *mine* in the first place? I don't see it. And if it isn't, 'who' could drop it? Here, you somehow seem to talk about something which *does not apply* to me. In a sense, the mastery was *never there* in 'my case'. But this cannot be *seen*. This is *lived*. I don't suffer, my whole *life is suffering* through and through. Of course, it's 'just there'. *What else* could it be if not 'just there'? *That is* the problem. *What else* could be the problem? But *no-one* can realize this, *no-one* can be free from this. *It realizes itself by being manifest as this life of mine, a life in fear and doubt*. Let me repeat this: *A life in fear and doubt is the only way to realize (read: to live) this*. How else could *dukkha* be manifest? What else could 'I' be if not a manifestation of *dukkha/Things*. Either *dukkha/Things* is manifestly 'inauthentic', which is the case in normal people. Or *dukkha/Things* is manifestly 'authentic', which is my case. In both cases, it is 'just there', but when it is *realized*, i.e. *lived authentically*, then *it is there as what it is*. That's my case. It's not hidden. It's there. It's *all-pervasive*. You can't run away. You can't do anything without manifesting more of it, more *dukkha*. You can't even *look* at it. Looking at *dukkha* is *dukkha* manifest on two levels, *dukkha* looking at *dukkha*. No way out. *Dukkha* is manifest. That's 'my life'. That's all there is to it. Nothing else. No-one here who can be free from it. If at all, 'I' am the very manifestation of it. *Dukkha* is not mine. But it is there. It is this life, 'my life'. Even this text is nothing but manifestation of more *dukkha*, it is '*dukkha revealed*'.

I hope you understand what I mean. There is no 'safe haven beyond', from which I could watch the spectacle as 'just being there' or as "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my Self." There is no-one who can be free, or rather: If such a one would exist, he would be a part of the problem (by being there). In a way, being asleep like normal people is better than this ... At least they have *some* pleasure before everything breaks down.

Here is only suffering. Only suffering, Bhante. And being tired of it all, what else is it if not more suffering? I practise restraint. I meditate. It's

just another manifestation of *dukkha*. Whatever I do, is driven by *dukkha*, it is *dukkha*. I don't even claim it as mine. *Dukkha* has already done that 'for me'.

The question what I could do, is pointless. Somehow it would be nice to hear that this state of affairs, as I described it, is not the end.

[N. 115]

21 October 2013

You seem to imply that there *has to be one* who lets go or sees. Although it seems for you that you are not the one having mastery over any of these things, the fact that your experience is *painful* for you, means you *are appropriating it*. Mastery doesn't mean having things obeying your will, mastery means ownership. The problem might be your keen desire to get out of it all, the desire that burns you and makes everything unbearable. That desire implies the presence of craving (which you can never see directly), and whenever there is craving *there is suffering*. In other words, your painful experience, your whole life *is not the cause of your pain*. It is *your craving* in regard to it, that the suffering *is there*. To put it differently, the all-pervasive unpleasantness of your experience *becomes suffering* when you crave in regard to it (i.e. want to do something about it, overcome it, make it disappear). Things always need a reference point in order to hurt. Life is *dukkha, for everyone*, whether they see it or not is not important, but that *dukkha* doesn't have to cause pain (i.e. be yours). When *dukkha* is not appropriated, it ceases to be *dukkha*.

And the safe haven is not beyond, it is *within*, and you discover it when you get used to that which encompasses it, namely impermanence and the dis-satisfactory. Pain disappears not when you replace it with pleasure or with peace, but when you see it as something which will *have to cease*, simply because it *has arisen*.

I should perhaps make clear that I don't suffer so much because of a lack of pleasure/peace or because there is so much pain, but on account of my own impermanence, which only becomes apparent when there is pain or when the heart does not beat in its normal way, etc. Yesterday, I certainly wrote in despair, which also had something to do with my heart, which became 'more active' again.

I think you know what you are talking about, but somehow it cannot apply here.

Regarding *ānāpānasati*/breathing, you once wrote: "In *ānāpānasati* you choose to breathe, as opposed to letting it happen while you are unaware of it." And also: "Whether you are aware of it or not—you *are doing it*." Isn't that a contradiction? When I already *do* breathing, even when *unaware* of it, how then can *ānāpānasati* be *choosing* to *breathe* (instead of choosing to be *aware* of it). This sounds as if doing (breathing) only involves choice when being done in awareness. Or rather as if one stops the 'autopilot' from doing the breathing and instead chooses to do it oneself. But wouldn't this be *breath-control*, even if one 'adopts' the former autopilot-rhythm?

Sometimes (rarely) it seems to me that everything I do is *redundant*. It's all there already, so why should I pretend doing this or that? Like breathing or seeing. I don't mean it in the sense that *I* already breathe or see, etc., but the *body*. So what is left for me to do actually? But I think even this is too much, because even an 'I' which does nothing or 'lets things happen' is not needed. But how can there be such insights (and sometimes they are not just intellectual), but still so much worry, anxiety and terror. From what I just said, it seems it would follow that this is also just the body reacting.

I see what you mean, perhaps I can clarify it further. The simplest way to address this, and resolve the contradiction you are facing, is to think of it like this: you have the intention to breathe, but this intention, when you're not aware of it, is that which you refer to as auto-pilot, and this is true to an extent. It is 'auto' since it is happening while one has no knowledge of the intention to do it, and it isn't since one is actually intending it. By 'choosing' to breathe one is supposed to be preventing the *view* of auto-pilot ("this is not *me*") arising in regard to the breathing, and maintaining the awareness of *the action/intention of breathing*. (Or: one is intending one's intention to breathe, so that one won't forget one's intention to breathe.)

This becomes 'breath control' when one is not aware of the fact that one is not *in a position of control* from the start, i.e. when the thought "I am doing it" remains the centre of the experience, as opposed to the 'intention to breathe'. If, however, one is to take that centre 'I am breathing' and sees it as *inseparable* from the original intention to breathe, that sense of control wouldn't manifest, since the volitional act of breathing is seen as *determined* by the intention to breathe. Furthermore, from this 'I am' point of view, this original intention is *not something which can fully be mine* (and as such it is not mine), since it is happening even when I'm not aware of it. By seeing that the gross intention/will 'I am' is directly determined by the 'auto' intention to breathe, one ceases to appropriate one's own will, *while one still wills it* (i.e. "I am breathing like this, I am breathing like that").

One can try to (and succeed to an extent) control even the original intention to breathe, by stopping it, but when non-breathing becomes too unpleasant one gives way to the intention to breathe in/out, despite one's opposing will. This is enough to show you that one's will is secondary to the intention (i.e. it is intended intention), and as such *not yours*. An act of breathing is particularly suitable for this since it is *neutral* in itself, doesn't involve anything external, and brings clarity. Nevertheless it's still a form of an *act*.

So by choosing to breathe, as opposed to choosing to do something else, one *does* one's breathing. By becoming aware of the original intention to

breathe, you *intend* your breathing. By seeing that you can never *will* that intention of breathing, which you are intending, you cease to appropriate your will. ‘I’ (or ‘you’) is squeezed out of the picture.

Let me know whether this does make it any clearer.

To answer your last paragraph: What is left for you to do is to cease any appropriation of *that body*, which breathes, sees, etc. Then anything arising on account of it cannot enter you (anxiety, terror, fear, suffering, sensuality).

[M. 195]

23 October 2013

I think I cannot say that it is clear yet, but perhaps clearer. In any case, it seems that *ānāpānasati* is almost always *taught wrongly*. Practically, I mainly use the breath as an *anchor*, to prevent ‘things’ from getting worse or to *counter* the outward pull of the senses. To pay attention to the breath is, for me, an answer to the question: “What should I do?” when ‘nothing else’ can be done. When doing that, I don’t really care what the breath ‘is’ (a ‘doing’ or not), I just ‘use’ it. Like a medicine, if you want. I hope you understand what I mean. I see the breath as a *whole*, as *one* thing, so I don’t *try* to locate it only at a certain spot, nevertheless it *is* somehow located. For me, paying attention to the breath is not a ‘luxury’, but rather a ‘necessity’, like using the emergency exit in the case of a fire. Is that ‘wrong’ in the sense that it isn’t *ānāpānasati*? Even if wrong, it seems to help. A certain amount of calm and pleasure arises.

[M. 196]

24 October 2013

In SN 35:95, the Buddha speaks of forms cognizable by the eye
that one has not seen,
that one never saw before,
that one does not see,
that one would not think one might see,

and similarly with the other senses and sense objects. This resembles MN 28, which says that forms, sounds, etc. “come into range” of the senses, implying that they *don’t have to* “come into range” in order to *be* forms,

sounds, etc. And indeed this *must* be so, in order to speak of a ‘meeting’ of the senses and their objects, i.e. the senses and their objects are (structurally) *more fundamental* than their meeting, i.e. they *precede* their meeting.

Nevertheless, speaking in practical terms, we cannot start our investigation *before the meeting has actually occurred*. So for *me*, a form is only what I *see now*, or *have seen before* or can *imagine seeing ‘later’ or ‘elsewhere’*. Or in other words: I see/saw only what either *is* or *was* ‘within range’ of the eye. But this, as the Buddha seems to say here, is not what form *is*, i.e. form does not need to be ‘within range’ to be form, i.e. it does not need to be *seen* in order to be form, but it is form just by virtue of being that which *could* be seen (given an eye).

Is that correct? Does that mean that form (sound, etc.), in itself, must not be regarded as phenomenon (*nāmarūpa*) but as being on the same ‘level’ as the four great elements, i.e. ‘below one’s feet’?

I somehow understand this ‘following’ from *anattā*. If seeing is not mine, i.e. if I am *not* that-because-of-which there is seeing, that because of which there is seeing, namely the *eye*, must be ‘below’, and consequently also what is seen (form), must be ‘below’ (on the level of the eye).

But the trouble is, if one *thinks* this, i.e. if one *thinks* that there is seeing because of an eye and forms ‘below’, one can’t help but imagining eye and forms being *phenomenal*, which cannot be the case, since they are *pre-phenomenal*. But how can they be pre-phenomenal, since all notions of ‘being’ somehow depend on phenomena?

How to solve this problem, i.e. how to acknowledge that eye and forms are ‘below’ but at the same time avoid to regard them as ‘*phenomena* below’?

[M. 197]

26 October 2013

Just an additional problem/question: In order to give myself the impression that I *choose* to breathe, I have to apply some *force* ('in'/'out'), otherwise I have the impression that I just 'bear witness', which (according to you) is *not* the correct way to practise *ānāpānasati*. Nevertheless this application of force (i.e. choosing to breath) is 'stressful' and feels 'unnatural' compared to witnessing, i.e. it appears as an unnecessary strain. 'Why am I doing it, if I don't have to?' is perhaps a question to describe this problem. So what should I do? Or do I make a mistake?

[N. 117]

29 October 2013

No, you shouldn't be forcing the breath in *ānāpānasati*. Just do it, as you would do any other repetitive action that would require using your body. You can 'bear witness' to your breath while you are *doing it*, or you can do it the same way as it is done when you are just bearing the witness to it. You don't force it, but you don't let it happen by itself either—it's a subtle action.

[M. 198]

30 October 2013

Thank-you for your answer. This 'doing thing' still confuses me. But I'm not sure whether I should try to figure it out. Perhaps we have a different understanding of what 'doing' means. In a way, I have learned not to suffer by *not doing* the breathing. I'm tired of 'doing'. Even 'witnessing' is somehow 'too much'. The sense of self doesn't seem to be present all the time to the same extent. It's hard to describe. The experience is clouded by a sense of 'familiarity' and 'normalcy' and thereby 'mitigated' and 'belittled'. While this is certainly what normal people call 'mental health', I recognize it as madness or derangement now. When it is there, and right now it is, something is *not* normal, *not* in order. It's like a fog or a haze. At other times this 'cloud' doesn't seem to be there, at least not to such an extent. And at those times, the experience is *not* taken for granted. It is *not* normal. *Not* familiar. *How can such a thing be normal?* There is *clarity* at those times. I mean literally. What one sees, hears, etc. is *not clouded* (or less so). But it is 'just there'. It has *nothing* to do with 'me' (at least this is the *direction* of it, since I cannot really say that no sense of self is present at all at those times, but it is not a hindrance). But when the fog is back, it has *everything* to do with 'me' again.

It also seems that things tend to be more clear in the evening/darkness. Perhaps one is naturally inclined to be less engaged then. But I don't know. 'Sleepiness' appears to be a hindrance to this clarity.

PS: I'm not sure whether you will answer my other letters too, at least the one that starts with SN 35:95?

[M. 199]

2 November 2013

First I want to apologize that I bombard you (again) with many e-mails without waiting for the answers to the already-sent ones. (I know that you said in the past that this is not a problem.)

I think I am right when I say that the 'experience as a whole' can be regarded as a *thing* too. But I find it problematic to '*approach*' *this thing in order to regard it* that way and/or as impermanent/unpleasant (as you once recommended). Because when I do (try) so, *this very attempt* is 'manifest'

and therefore *included* in the whole. In other words: The attempt to *surmount* the whole is *undermined*—it becomes *futile* as soon as it manifests.

This is (as I only realize now, while writing this letter) somehow a good description of my suffering. The ‘experience as a whole’ is *undermining* or *suppressive/oppressive* in the way described above. It undermines ‘my’ attempts to ‘surmount it’ or ‘look at it’ or to ‘get rid of it’ by *including* these attempts as soon as they arise. Whatever I do in order to break free becomes immediately part of the problem, i.e. it is *manifest within* that ‘structure’ which I try to overcome.

So somehow *it does not work* for me to regard that experience as ‘not mine’, ‘not me’, ‘not my Self’—for the very reason that I am not in the position to do so in the first place. As far as ‘I am’ is concerned, it is ‘included’. I am not able to observe (‘be the observer’) without being ‘caught in the act’ immediately, and this ‘getting caught’ is not done by me. It’s just the result of my attempts being necessarily ‘within’ that ‘whole’, which is *insurmountable*.

Well, at least I can state relatively clearly now why I fail and why nothing works. ‘This is not me’ is as delusional as ‘This is me’. In both cases, the ‘I’ somehow goes ‘unnoticed’, which—in fact—is not the fault of that ‘I’. It is the fault of that ‘structure’, i.e. it somehow seems to lack that ‘transparency’, which is needed to reveal anything as being ‘included’.

I can only speculate for the moment, but it seems ‘the way out’ can lie only in the infinity of that ‘whole’, which you also seem to say in one of your essays. Perhaps the way out actually lies in the very fact that the ‘whole’ undermines any of my attempts to get out (as described above), until these attempts are no longer made?

Perhaps you can say something helpful here?

[N. 118]

6 November 2013

Reply to the letter of 24 October 2013:

There are quite a few very good points you raise in this letter. You said: “This resembles MN 28, which says that forms, sounds, etc. ‘come into range’ of the senses, implying that they don’t have to ‘come into range’ in order to be forms, sounds, etc. And indeed this must be so, in order to

speak of a 'meeting' of the senses and their objects, i.e. the senses and their objects are (structurally) more fundamental than their meeting, i.e. they precede their meeting... But the trouble is, if one *thinks* this, i.e. if one *thinks* that there is seeing because of an eye and forms 'below', one can't help but imagining eye and forms being *phenomenal*, which cannot be the case, since they are *pre-phenomenal*. But how can they be pre-phenomenal, since all notions of 'being' somehow depend on phenomena."

Exactly, forms, sounds, etc. don't *exist* before the meeting takes place. You can think of them as pre-phenomenal (in relation to phenomenal), but it cannot be said that they *are*, i.e. that they exist. The existence of a phenomenon is just a *borrowed* 'appearance', when things come into range. Hence their 'non-existing' state is more fundamental than their existence.

And that's how you overcome the problem of regarding them as phenomena 'below' (or even better: that's how you cease to regard their regarding-as-phenomena-below as below). Understand that the experience of a phenomenon is *secondary* to that 'below', and when that 'below' becomes a phenomenon (inevitably, in one's thinking), regard *that* as secondary to 'below', and so on. Whenever a thought arises, don't conceive it as 'standing for' that because of which that thought has arisen. And the question is not how to stop thinking about it (since thinking makes it into a new phenomenon), nor how to reach the 'first point', nor how to figure it all out to fit, but to persist, *repetitively*, in *regarding that thought* as secondary (i.e. determined, bound by) that 'below'. That's how one *undoes* the gratuitous priority that is given to the *existing phenomenon*. Taking away that priority means the cessation of existence. And this is all one has to do—shift that priority from things that are secondary onto things that are primary, so to speak. This would eventually fade out the discrepancy of one's experience, discrepancy that is known as *existence*.

You asked: "How to solve this problem, i.e. how to acknowledge that eye and forms are 'below' but at the same time avoid regarding them as '*phenomena below*'?"

So to reiterate: you will *know* (but not experience in the sense of a phenomenon arising), that eye and forms are below, when your regarding-them-as-phenomena-below is not regarded as that which is

below. Or, furthermore, when your regarding-of-regarding-them-as-phenomena-below is not *regarded* as that which is below... and so on, you get the picture. It's not about finding the source of the thought, it's about not *conceiving* that source as a thought (or conceiving thought as a source... same thing). You cease to conceive it when the *habit* of conceiving is gone. And the habit of conceiving is gone, when it becomes plain that the *attempts* to conceive that which is below are *inconceivable* (i.e. unreachable).

Reply to the letter of 2 November 2013:

No problems with emailing me. I don't feel bombarded.

I see what you mean here, and for the answer have a look at my last letter. If: "The 'experience as a whole' is *undermining* or *suppressive/oppressive* in the way described above. It undermines 'my' attempts to 'surmount it' or 'look at it' or to 'get rid of it' by *including* these attempts as soon as they arise. Whatever I do in order to break free becomes immediately part of the problem, i.e. it is *manifest within* that 'structure' which I try to overcome."

Then just let go of the problem. You seem to be *holding it*, just so that you can *solve it*. But if the solution is inseparable from the problem, it is not more valuable than the problem itself—it 'belongs' to it. Your attempts to break free, manifest *within* that structure, *because* they are *part of that structure*. If your suffering doesn't belong to you, then it is not yours. (You'll know this because if it hurts, it means you are appropriating it, means you are taking what is not yours, which is why it can/does hurt you.)

You asked: "Perhaps the way out actually lies in the very fact that the 'whole' undermines any of my attempts to get out (as described above), until these attempts are no longer made?" Exactly—until you let go of them.

Regarding the problem of the senses and their objects, I think I understand what you say (at least basically). I would like to show you some observations regarding MN 28. Please tell me whether they are correct or not. MN 28 mentions 3 cases:

1st case:

- internal eye is intact
- no external forms come into range
- no appropriate connexion
- no corresponding type of consciousness

2nd case:

- internal eye is intact
- external forms come into range
- no appropriate connexion
- no corresponding type of consciousness

3rd case:

- internal eye is intact
- external forms come into range
- appropriate connexion
- corresponding type of consciousness

As I understand it, 'internal' refers to oneself, i.e. what is described here, cannot be observed in others. In *all three cases*, the eye is *intact*, and with intact eyes one cannot *not* see. So the "corresponding type of consciousness," which only arises in the 3rd case, does *not* mean that there is *no seeing* in the 1st and 2nd case. That also means that the Buddha does not try to *explain* consciousness by 'appropriately connecting' a material organ with external forms. I would also say that the absence of external forms in the 1st case does not necessarily refer to a 'blank' or 'dark' visual field. It might be more fruitful to interpret this absence in relation to the other two cases, i.e. what is present in the 2nd and 3rd case, is absent in the 1st. With regard to the 'appropriate connexion', and I'm *not* sure here, I would say that it refers to 'we see only what we look at' (which requires that there is something to look at in the first place, something within range of the eye). Let me illustrate this:

1st case — I'm awake and not blind. I'm in Berlin. So the Eiffel Tower *in Paris* is not within range of my eye. Therefore I can't *look at it* (making the 'appropriate connexion'). So *I* don't see the Eiffel Tower.

2nd case — I'm awake and not blind. I'm *in Paris*. The Eiffel Tower is within range of my eye (it's part of my visual field). But I overlook/ignore it, because I talk to (and therefore look at) a passerby. So *I* don't see the Eiffel Tower. (But I *could*, since the *eye* has 'seen' it.)

3rd case — I'm awake and not blind. I'm in Paris. The Eiffel Tower is within range of my eye. And I also look at it. Therefore *I* see it.

According to MN 28, the Eiffel Tower is *only now*, in the 3rd case, included in the five *holding* aggregates. So this 'holding' must have something to do with the 'appropriate connexion', which I have described here as 'looking at'.

If you think that I grasped MN 28 wrongly, I would like to ask you to correct me.

This directly leads me to a question: SN 22:122 says that even an *arahat* should attend in an appropriate way to the five *holding* aggregates as impermanent, suffering, etc. How is that to be understood? Why *holding*-aggregates even in the case of an *arahat*?

Another question: How does the 3rd case of MN 28

- 1) internal eye is intact
- 2) external forms come into range
- 3) appropriate connexion
- 4) corresponding type of consciousness

relate to, for example, SN 35:93, which says that in dependence on

- 1) the eye
- 2) and forms
- 3) eye-consciousness arises.

4) the coming together, the meeting, the convergence of these three phenomena is eye-contact?

If, and only if, 'eye-contact' is identical to 'appropriate connexion' and *if, only if*, 'corresponding type of consciousness' is identical to 'eye-consciousness' (I marked them by colours), the *sequence* in SN 35:93 *should be different*, namely

- 1) eye
- 2) forms

3) eye-contact (to ‘fit’ MN 28’s “appropriate connexion”)

4) eye-consciousness (to ‘fit’ MN 28’s “corresponding type of consciousness”)

But the sequence isn’t like that. As I see it, it would be a ‘raping’ of the text to force one Sutta upon the other in that way. And I don’t think the Buddha taught in such a lax way that the sequence does not really matter. So I can only conclude that the “appropriate connexion” of MN 28 is *not* the ‘eye-contact’ of SN 35:93, and therefore the “corresponding type of consciousness” of MN 28 might *not* be the eye-consciousness of SN 35:93 either. So how do you relate MN 28 and SN 35:93 to each other (if at all)?

In your second e-mail you say, regarding my problem:

“Then just let go of the problem. You seem to be *holding it*, just so that you can *solve it*. But if the solution is inseparable from the problem, it is not more valuable than the problem itself—it ‘belongs’ to it. Your attempts to break free, manifest *within* that structure, *because* they are *part of that structure*. If your suffering doesn’t belong to you, then it is not yours. (You’ll know this because if it hurts, it means you are appropriating it, means you are taking what is not yours, which is why it can/does hurt you.)”

Who or what is that ‘you’ you are referring to here? It seems to me that my identification with the body is somehow lessening, at least at times. But it still seems that I move it around, like moving around a ‘corpse’ or ‘puppet’, making use of the senses (including mind) of that corpse/puppet to orient myself. So the ‘I’ somehow seems to be related to that ‘moving’ and ‘orienting’. Not exactly a ‘thing’, but something that manifests *over time*, i.e. *acting*. It also seems that I’m conscious (or ‘free’) *because* I can act. But then, this acting seems to directly depend on that corpse/puppet... If I understand you correctly, I have to see this dependence again and again. And even that seeing/understanding is only possible by making use of that corpse/puppet, i.e. the ‘*mano*’ of it.

Perhaps I could also say that the ‘I’ seems to be ‘innate’ to that body, as if it were its *ability to act*. The things that appear in dependence of the senses are not ‘just there’ in an abstract sense. They are *stimulating*, they are *influencing*. They are ‘unavoidable’. And this somehow implies that acting is possible.

I somehow understand that one is no thing, but nevertheless one is somehow manifest as ‘animating’ a thing (this body), i.e. manifest *over time*. I hope this makes sense.

[M. 201]

12 November 2013

One could get the impression that MN 28 (and certainly other Suttas too) defines the sense objects in terms of what ‘I’ am not instead of what the *senses* are not. You once wrote that one’s phenomenal body is the product of the senses, and I would agree here. Nevertheless it does seem that MN 28 and others speak about an encounter of *that phenomenal body* (oneself) with *other phenomena*. According to MN 28, the external objects ‘come into range’. This hardly applies to one’s phenomenal body that one cannot avoid ‘having’. One *can* avoid looking in the mirror, one *can* avoid using one’s hand to touch one’s body and one *can* avoid thinking about oneself, but one *cannot* avoid experiencing things like bodily warmth, posture, heaviness, etc. And to *that* extent, ‘coming into range’ doesn’t apply, since the body already and always is ‘within range’ (as far as those unavoidable experiences are concerned).

There is a *difference* between ‘sensual desire’ and desire for ‘having a body’. The difference might not be *fundamental*, but it concerns exactly the difference between things that can (but don’t have to) ‘come into range’ and those which are ‘always there’ (namely one’s phenomenal body). AN 4:184 seems to acknowledge this when it *differentiates* between 1) fear of death due to *desire for sensuality* and 2) fear of death due to *desire for the body*. While, as you pointed out, *both* the objects of sensual desire *and* one’s body are a product of the senses, there is a qualitative difference in terms of *availability* and therefore in terms of desire.

So it seems that MN 28 and others speak about the encounter of the body one ‘has’ (and cannot avoid ‘having’) with *other phenomena* that can (but don’t have to) ‘come into range’. But the Sabba Sutta (‘The All’) and others that *don’t* mention ‘internal/external’ might speak about something *different*.

As far as I can see, the usage of the term ‘internal’ in MN 28 can only apply *because* there is the dyad between a phenomenal body and other

phenomena. The eye is not internal in relation to the external form that 'comes into range', but in relation to that *phenomenon* which is 'my body'. And recently I seem to experience what that actually means. The senses, by residing or *hiding* 'within' that phenomenal body, are *beyond reach*, i.e. 'below one's feet'. One is 'hollowed out'. What an absurd and ridiculous show that is!

But the main point of that letter is a certain ambiguity in the meaning of what a 'sense object' is in the Suttas. It seems that it can *either* be what my (phenomenal) body is not, *or* it can mean the counterparts of the actual senses. It seems that the appearance of the terms 'internal'/'external' is the indicator to distinguish the two.

[M. 202]

14 November 2013

My understanding has changed (again). But I'm not sure yet how to reconcile this with MN 28, etc. Somehow I was keen to save the *interiority* of the eye (and the other senses). But as far as I can see now, this is futile. You once wrote very nicely that the senses are '*out there*', *next to the matter that is perceived*. And as I understand it now, this must be taken *literally*. In other words: It is *not* the case that an eye 'in here' (or 'my eye') is 'reaching out' for matter 'out there'. Instead the 'eye' actually '*is*' where the 'forms' are perceived. That the eye is 'in here' or rather, that forms are seen 'from here' is an *additional* phenomenon that depends on the activity of the other senses, especially touch. Let me explain: Equally 'out there' but '*closer*' than the forms perceived with the eye, is that 'thing' (to which the eye *belongs*) which is the *object of the sense of touch*, namely the 'body'. Or in other words: We have 1) the (invisible) eye, 'out there' together with and 'next to' forms. And 2) we have the (impalpable) tactile sense 'out there' together with and 'next to' *that* tangible thing which is one's body, to which the (invisible) eye *belongs*. The latter tangible thing, while being equally 'out there', is phenomenally '*closer*' than the visible forms. And since the eye is part of that tangible body-phenomenon, there is now a *phenomenal distance* between that tangible body and those visible forms. And *only because of that distance* there is '*seeing*' as we actually know it. (This might actually be the point of reconciliation with MN 28.) So 'our' seeing actually *depends* on that superimposition. And *that* is the reason why I could experience the cessation of the *internal eye and sight* when the *other* senses shut down, in that summer night last year.

[M. 203]

16 November 2013

You can ignore my last letter (unless you want to reply to it anyway, which is also fine). It was only another step on the path to a better understanding and not 'the real thing'.

I think that I understand now the statement that contact is the coming together of *three*: senses, sense objects and consciousness. This actually means that contact or collision has three constituents: The senses, their

objects and the *manifestation of resistance*, which is the consciousness. The manifestation of resistance or *resistance as phenomenon* is consciousness, and as such directly depends on the senses and their objects. Still not sure whether MN 28 talks about *this* or something else, because the ‘appropriate connexion’ *precedes* the consciousness in MN 28, so it *cannot* mean contact, because there is no contact without manifest resistance. But *if* MN 28 is in fact talking about this, the ‘contact’ would be equal to the arising of the *five-holding-aggregates* and *not* to the ‘appropriate connexion’ mentioned even before the arising of consciousness.

[M. 204]

16 November 2013

Things are happening a bit fast at the moment. But since it’s important, I thought I should write again.

Within a single sense-field, there is no possibility to discern the sense and sense objects. Only the *result* of the collision is ‘there’: one part (sixth) ‘world’. As I understand it, this inbuilt inability to discern is *avijjā*. It is *because* of that inability that the ‘there’ of the world (and the arisen world, for that matter) cannot be seen as stemming from the collision below. ‘The world exists’ becomes the basic fact, appears as fundamental.

I think that *this* is the *phassa* (contact): The appearance of a ‘one thing’ where in fact *three* come together, namely the senses and their objects and the corresponding phenomenon of resistance (consciousness), which is a borrowed ‘isness’ of ‘the below’ due to the collision. You already said something like this in the past, but it wasn’t that clear then.

I hope I don’t render useless what you *might* have already written as answers to previous letters. I regard them as still valid and would like to hear your answers.

I write in order to save you the possible trouble of answering some of my former letters, in case you find it unnecessary after reading this one. My understanding regarding consciousness has changed again, and it might not be the last time that such change happens (also regarding other subjects). Such rapid changes are not easy to integrate in the rather slow mechanism of correspondence.

As I understand it now, consciousness is an external ('existential') dimension 'added' to matter. It is a 'from the outside' with regard to matter. So consciousness is 'perpendicular' to matter. Without it, matter does not exist, which does *not* mean that matter is matter *because* of it. Matter *as* matter does not depend on that additional dimension imposed on it from the outside, i.e. by the senses (which are themselves matter).

I also had a weak experience of the 'world' depending on the body/senses, which themselves were 'empty', only determining the *extent* of that world. The end of *being* in the world, and also the end of the *being* of things in the world.

I also somehow 'encountered' the infinitude of space, but not 'after the fourth *jhāna*' or anything like that. It's more a being able to notice it. But this is also shallow and not stable. But, as I understand it, one can *escape* even the infinite space (see the paragraph above), because it belongs to 'being in the world'. It's all around *me*. But if *I* am no longer around, then...

I think one can say that the world appears, *because* it does not exist.

[N. 119]

21 November 2013

Provided I didn't misunderstand what you were referring to, the answer is —yes, indeed, consciousness is utterly external, like any other aggregate is. It is out there, *with* matter (or superimposed to it), and matter is conceived as matter because *it is conscious*. Obviously this is not to be understood as if matter has consciousness (that would be just a projection of the same principle of the Self), but it should be regarded as “in this experience as a whole, that which is my consciousness is *out there*, external, outside, *next to* that matter (not ‘inside me’), and it cannot ever appear as an object (made of matter, perceived, felt).” That's why the Buddha said consciousness is to be *understood*.

Because consciousness doesn't appear, it tends to be attributed/identified with the Self, since the Self too *appears* as something-which-doesn't-appear.

Indeed superimposition of consciousness and matter (and the other aggregates, which all have their own domain), is beginningless and endless, i.e. infinite. This infinity, however, pertains to the domain of the aggregates, to their ‘plane’. Once this whole plane is abandoned (by matter not finding footing in it; by consciousness not manifesting in it), the infinity is abandoned too and everything else that comes in between. That's how one brings an end to *saṃsāra*.

Don't worry about the quick-firing of your letters. Send them whenever you feel like, and when your understanding changes, send them again.

[M. 206]

26 November 2013

Thank-you for your answer. If nothing has changed, you will go to Sri Lanka on 27 November. I'm not sure to what extent an exchange of e-mails will be possible from then on. Anyway ... Let me thank you. Thank-you for your help. I think I can hardly judge at the moment how deeply I am indebted to you. For me, there is no going back. Thank you! I hope you enjoy your stay in Sri Lanka.

[N. 120]

27 November 2013

Yes, I should hopefully be leaving for Sri Lanka this afternoon. I don't know either, to what extent I'll be able to use my emails, but feel free to write, I'll reply whenever I can.

I'm glad that you find it helpful, though I was merely conveying how I understood the Buddha's Teaching, it was you who was making all the effort.

[M. 207]

15 December 2013

I hope you arrived well in Sri Lanka. I'm hesitant to write you. In order to address the problems, I see no way of avoiding letting you know that my *heart* is telling me that it is no longer that of a *puthujjana* (and it does so simply by *refusing* to get *pierced* in the way it formerly did), whether 'I' actually believe it or not. I will address this a bit later.

But first I want to talk about another problem and just want to hear your opinion: I practised a lot of restraint in the last few months. But *now*, a kind of laxness creeps in. I no longer see the same danger in sensuality. Of course, it would be nothing but foolishness to begin to indulge again, but the strictness of denying myself pleasure appears a bit artificial to me (but, as I see it, it *was* necessary). At the same time I can stand that sensuality much better. Not only is there less pulling and less piercing, but there is no absolute need to act, i.e. one can just 'sit it out' without fighting it as the only alternative to indulging.

After my (physical) heart problems a few months ago, it was really a matter of life and death for me to become liberated (or at least 'almost' liberated). After that, it was my plan to become a monk. And now *this* ... (please note the irony). It seems that I cannot strive in the same way as before. By the way, there wasn't a specific *moment* of 'realization'. It also seems that I was on the path for over a year (remember last year, when you also saw a change in my understanding, but this wasn't yet enough). With regard to my current state, I had a dream: I saw three people hanged, but still alive. In order to save them, I took a knife and cut the three ropes above their heads and also the remainders of the ropes

around their necks. But the possible meaning of that dream became ‘clear’ only later.

For quite a while I liked to think that I already was a *sotāpanna* or at least on the path. I see this as delusion now, even as dangerous. This problem seems to be quite common (if ‘common’ is the proper term here). Some people seem to regard it only as a matter of *view*. But one has to understand *how not to suffer*. I mean not ‘theoretically’ but in terms of being an embodiment of this understanding. There is, of course, still suffering, even to the extent of fear and terror (at least in my case), but one doesn’t have to ‘own’ that, at least not fully.

Now, what makes me still *doubt* (isn’t that strange?) is the (seeming) lack of impermanence in terms of *change* that was involved whenever I contemplated things in a way that finally led to the desired result. I was thinking along the lines of Sn 5:10:

*“Having nothing, no attachment, this is the island with nothing beyond,
this is called Nibbāna, I say, the end of old age and death.”⁶⁴*

The outcome of that contemplation was that ‘letting go/be’ is not a matter of choice, it is not something that ‘I’ can or need to exercise by ‘restraining’ myself or by ‘abstaining’ from action. There is no need to do so, because things already are ‘abandoned’, i.e. no one is able to let them go or be, because ‘letting them go or be’ is the only way in which they already exist. Does that make sense?

But what is a source of worry for me (the heart does not really care) is that the only impermanence was in the notion of *mastery* over things, but not in *things*. So things are still ‘eternal’, if you know what I mean. I don’t mean that one can count on them, but in things, or rather, in that thing which is the ‘whole’, no change is manifest. It is just ‘there’, it endures, it resists, not responsible for itself, powerless, uncertain. But there is no ‘timer’ visible anywhere, which tells me that, after a while, this thing really *has* to vanish. And even *then* I had to *believe* that the timer is telling me the truth.

Is it possible to say something with regard to this? Actually, I think impermanence is not a good translation for *anicca*, because it is too much

associated either with a *future loss* or with *flux*, both of which cannot be seen in the present. Impermanence or change in what is dear to one only *stands for anicca*. Things are *unavailable* and *gratuitous*. This can be seen at any time.

[M. 208]

15 December 2013

“Whatever is subject to origination is also subject to cessation.” This must not be understood in reference to the past and future, for if the origination were in the past and the cessation in the future, it would be impossible to see/realize them *now*.

‘Origination’ with regard to the present means that a present thing depends on another present thing, i.e. one sees a thing ‘within’ a thing or a thing ‘in terms of’ another thing. If one has seen this *origination*, one has also seen the *cessation*, i.e. the thing has ceased to ‘stand on its own’ or to ‘exist’—in the *present*.

What I say now, is muddled. I don’t see it, I only think that I have to see it: Matter must stop to ‘exist’ (in the way described above).

Sartre gives a nice description (without knowing what he is actually talking about) in his *Nausea*: “I lean my hand on the seat but pull it back hurriedly: it exists.”⁶⁵

Here we have the ‘existence’ or ‘presence’ of matter (substance) within the context of contact (between ‘my hand’ and ‘the seat’). There is no other context for the existence of matter.

If this is really seen, matter would no longer be ‘the source of the trouble’, so to speak. There no longer would *be* something that could come ‘within range’, hiding ‘out there’ on its own. In other words: That because of which suffering is there, would be extinct. But I still wonder why the ‘experience’ still continues in that case. I think it must have something to do with the ‘life-determinations’ (*āyu-saṅkhāra*), which (I suppose) only a Buddha can see and relinquish.

It is nice to hear from you, and yes, I am slowly settling here. I might start with a *kuṭi* project relatively soon, we'll see.

I am glad to hear that your understanding got confirmed. It might still take a bit more time—the habit of doubt and expectation to see things in the way you expect them, will take time to subside.

This is indeed so. Once the heart of the problem is resolved, i.e. there is no second arrow, everything loses its importance, and this affects restraint too. Seeing that regardless of what one does, one can never suffer in the same way again, removes the necessity and importance of *doing certain things* in order not to suffer (keeping the precepts for example), and this is nothing but dropping of *sīlabātaparāmāsa*, or at least that's how your lines read to me. So the temptations, indeed just sit them out.

“It seems that I cannot strive in the same way as before.” That's because it feels that you have accomplished what you strove for. Give it time (without over-indulging it), and then the accomplishment might cease to be enough and you will want more, and then you will pick it up again.

“Some people seem to regard it only as a matter of view. But one has to understand *how not to suffer*.” Correct, and very important.

“...things already are ‘abandoned’, i.e. no-one is able to let them go or be, because ‘letting them go or be’ is the only way in which they already exist. Does that make sense?” It does. This is what I was writing about in the *Infinity of the Mind* essay. Abstaining from action is another form of action, and what one has to understand is that it is inherently *impossible* to appropriate things, and only that's how the gratuitous appropriation ceases.

Yes, impermanence is not the best translation, it makes one wait for that ‘timer’ you are referring to, since that would be the only way for someone to see a thing ceasing. The eternal long enduring whole, I know what you mean, will not cease in time, since it is *of* time. To see the whole as impermanent, means to see it as *arisen of its own accord*, and that's what *anicca* is. *Because* the thing stands there on its own, that thing will have to *cease* on its own, and having any say about it is fundamentally inconceivable. Because one couldn't control the arising, when cessation

takes place (even if it is not taking place *now*), one won't be able to interfere with it (or rather: whatever one does on account of it, is structurally impossible to be an interference). Seeing that neither arising, nor ceasing, nor changing-while-standing can be taken in control (i.e. a thing remains not-mine throughout its appearance), and seeing this in regard to every experience, one has fully developed the perception of *anicca*, one has fully removed one's Self and conceit.

[M. 209]

18 December 2013

What you said about impermanence makes sense, but I think you are also right when you say: "It might still take a bit more time, the habit of doubt and expectation to see things in the way you—expect them, will take time to subside." This includes also the doubt whether this 'accomplishment' will last. But I seem to forget how it was before, so the sense of accomplishment might cease, but that doesn't mean that 'the problem' is able to reinstall itself. You say: "So the temptations, indeed just sit them out." I partly gave in, but there seems to be a 'red line'. I *could* cross it, but I understand that this wouldn't be to my benefit. "Give it time (without over-indulging it), and then the accomplishment might cease to be enough and you will want more, and then you will pick it up again." I think I already sense this. The relief is *big*, but I'm still not unshakable. As long as death is a threat (including a possible new birth as a human), I can't sit back and take it easy. But if no acute agitation/arousal is present, I don't need to *do* or *restrain* anything in order to be calm. It's just *normal*. A bit as if the connection between head and heart is (partly) cut. But Māra still has a foot in the door. It's still *my* body. And if I look in the mirror, I still see *me*.

For the moment, I can't squeeze much more out of myself. I hope this is acceptable.

[M. 210]

27 December 2013

Some time passed since I wrote my last e-mail. Nevertheless the suffering pointed out in that letter is still there, trying to convince me that this is a problem I need to fix. But I can't. It's not a matter of trying to be rational. One cannot 'reject' or 'disprove' the irrational. This situation is absurd. As if someone cast a spell on me. So I cannot *think* my way out of it.

My interest in things that I formerly liked is significantly reduced. Nevertheless the habit of doing *some* of them is still there. For example: I tried to play online games again (something I did almost daily and often for hours). But there is no point to it anymore. So I could stop it 'naturally'. No restraint necessary. Other things are still a bit (or a lot) more seducing, but it's all alien territory.

I was in danger of falling back into sexual activity for a while, i.e. I was *open* to let it happen, but this has also subsided. In a certain dangerous situation a (real) acoustic alarm went off outside. I knew how to interpret this.

If possible, I would still like to hear your advice regarding the suffering mentioned in my last letter and the first paragraph of this one. I *can* bear it. But it seems that there is nothing else I can do. I try to see it as a phenomenon, i.e. *outside* the context of its alleged 'cause'. It's mere oppression, trying to *make* me think about what happened. But you can't argue with it. The suffering lies in its *ambiguity*. If I actually *had* insulted the Buddha, without any doubt it would be a grave but a *simple* matter. But it's all about 'being unsure'.

[N. 122]

27 December 2013

Could you please re-send the last email you were referring to? Is it the one from the 17th of December? Sorry, I haven't noticed any questions in it, so I didn't provide a quicker reply.

The *kuṭi* project is slowly picking up, so I am getting busier (before it all hopefully calms down). The way things are done here means the whole thing will be rather slow, overall.

When you say “this is the problem I need to fix, but I can’t,” what specifically are you referring to?

[M. 211]

28 December 2013

I was referring to my letter from the 19th of December which you (seemingly) did not receive. With regard to my mail from 17th of December, you are quite right: There are no questions in it, so you did not miss anything.

Here is the mail in question (from the 19th of December):

* * *

Yesterday I read a posting in a forum, where someone said (within the context of being a ‘*bodhisattva*’) he would like to be reborn as a human to help people, make the world better, etc. Then I thought (or even said to myself, I can’t remember clearly) something along the lines that “not even the Buddha was that stupid.” Almost immediately I realized that this sounded as if I had ascribed stupidity to the Buddha. That was of course food for my mind (“How could *I* say that?,” “*What* did I really mean?,” etc.)—similar to the problem with the pension, if you remember. While it no longer has that piercing, overwhelming quality, it is nevertheless *sticky*. Like someone who cannot enter your apartment but nevertheless keeps ringing and knocking on the door all day. And this *is* disturbing, i.e. there is the temptation to *fix* this. And this seems all the more absurd for the very reason that I don’t see how I could possibly ascribe stupidity to the Buddha. And yet I said this. Even such silly thoughts of (being the first one) ‘losing stream-entry’ because of this ‘crime’ pop up. This somehow has a taste of Māra’s intervention.

I also had toothaches for almost the whole day. No second arrow. Actually, they are much easier to bear than those doubts above.

Perhaps there is something to say about this?

Yes, I didn't get that one. Curious.

Your understanding has arrived where it is through the 'obsessive thinking' on Dhamma (i.e. trying to understand). There is a Sutta somewhere in AN⁶⁶ which lists this type as one way of arriving at the Dhamma. Nevertheless it is a form of an obsessive reflexion and thinking, and although the understanding might be there, the obsessive habit is still strong, hence the pressing nature of "fix this" and "if I were really a *sotāpanna*, this wouldn't arise" and so on. That is indeed Māra, and until your mind 'hardens' in its confidence of being beyond doubt, Māra will try to test it.

Desire to 'fix this' is craving, to put it simply. You can just sit it out, and practise the letting-go of even that desire to fix it, i.e. develop *samādhī*. Alternatively you can fix it, but it has to be done without the craving to do so, which means it has to be done with *samādhī*, i.e. with your mind being immovable in regard to it. So, either way, developing *samatha* overcomes the obsession habit. And to develop *samatha* you don't have to sit in meditation for hours per day. You don't have to sit at all (it can help, but that's all). *Samatha* is developed *through* that understanding that has been acquired, by simply keeping it in your mind, without actively dwelling on it, just maintaining the order. *Samatha* is *not* developed through a form of *observance* or *act*, which is what the 'formal sitting meditation' is considered to be in the general view. That is just another external observance (or a duty) that one ends up depending on, existentially.

Thus if you do *ānāpānasati*, do it with understanding (i.e. phenomenologically).

I remember this Sutta about those different ways to arrive at the Dhamma. I was always wondering what this ‘additional’ and seemingly ‘mysterious’ way was. I think you can judge some things regarding me better than I myself. Actually I could only arrive at my current understanding *because* I added an *external* perspective to my experience, i.e. that of the Buddha. For the *puthujjana*, who tries to understand his experience *in terms* of his experience, there is no way out, because it is always about ‘him’ in one way or another.

From your reply I’m not really sure whether I could make my problem clear enough. Loosely speaking: Māra is trying to convince me *that I disparaged the Buddha*. And *that* makes me suffer, because when I look back, I *really* said (or at least thought): “Even the Buddha was not that stupid” when I saw this person on that forum, trying to ‘save the world’ as a *bodhisattva*. So I said something ambiguous (i.e. something that could *also* be understood as reference to a ‘stupid Buddha’), and I’m unable to convince myself that it was all harmless. So when I was talking about the temptation to ‘fix that’, I was *not* referring to my ‘obsessive thinking’ *nor* (primarily) to doubt regarding being a *sotāpanna*, but to a *moral issue* of having disparaged the Buddha, or rather, my *inability* to convince myself that I haven’t. And therein lies all the absurdity of this whole situation.

I only pointed that out again in order to make sure you see my problem clearly. Does this make any difference with regard to the advice you gave in your last letter?

[N. 124]

28 December 2013

Thank-you for clarification. Yes, I seem to have understood you correctly. Obsessiveness in this case refers to your taking for-granted the need to fix even a (seemingly) moral issue. In other words, you feel like “it has to be done,” so you give in. What has to be done is develop strength and confidence in action coming from understanding, so in this case although you might have had a careless ambiguous expression of your thought, you *know* that it is internally impossible for you to disrespect the Buddha, even if you were to rudely swear his name, internally the attitude wouldn’t carry over. (You might feel bad for doing even that, but it would be impossible to disparage him, on the existential level.) Yet, Māra will try to make you doubt it, for as long as that confidence is not fortified. And then, when this is gone or resolved, something else will come up of a similar nature, and then you have to do it again, and then again, but only for a while. Because sooner or later doubt (as a hindrance, since as a fetter it is already gone), will bother you less and less, because it knows that there is no point and the mind will not move in regard to it. Since for you, now, the experience is still fairly new, doubt as a hindrance will come back often, trying to (in a vain hope) re-establish itself as a fetter too. When it becomes apparent that this is impossible, it will leave you alone, as a fetter, as a hindrance it might come based on a particular experience, but even when it does come, it will not be there as a threat towards becoming a hindrance. In other words, it will be easier and easier to bear (provided one doesn’t get involved in too immoral actions).

[M. 213]

28 December 2013

Thank-you for your answer. It was to the point. I needed to hear something like that. (I had to laugh out of relief, I think.)

Provided I don’t die before, I will become a *bhikkhu* too, i.e. when it becomes apparent that I no longer need the pension.

I think I can understand your decision to go to Sri Lanka (I could think of more than one reason). I hope you can settle down fast and receive enough support.

53. NoD, PHASSA (e); CtP, pp. 75-6.
54. Translated from *Meisterung der Existenz durch die Lehre des Buddha* (Volume 1); 2nd revised edition, 1997, p. 38.
55. Mv I.39.1-6.
56. Tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *MLDB*, pp. 525-6.
57. Th. Thanissaro Bhikkhu.
58. Tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *MLDB*, p. 875.
59. Tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *CDB*. p. 218.
60. *ibid*.
61. DN 11, Tr. Thanissaro Bhikkhu.
62. AN 4:37, tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *NDB*, p. 427.
63. Tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *CDB*, p. 1635.
64. Tr. Ānandajoti Bhikkhu.
65. *Nausea*, Jean-Paul Sartre; Penguin Classics; new edition, 2000, p. 248.
66. AN 4:170.

2014

[M. 214]

3 January 2014

Today I had another such strange experience: With regard to a person (on a forum), who likes to quote the Suttas a lot (in a bad way, if you know what I mean), I was thinking in a hostile and conceited way that he should “*stop reading that nonsense*” (and perhaps “investigate more” or something like that). This is exactly the same pattern as in the last (recent) incident regarding ‘stupidity’ and ‘the Buddha’. Just when this began to heal (thanks to your intervention), ‘it’ happened again, but now with regard to the Suttas, which are ‘nonsense’. But this time I’m not ‘devastated’ (and yet it hurts). I think it is just *too obvious* that this is a ‘trick’ played on me. In all those years, even in times of utter desperation, I was *never* thinking in such a way about the Buddha or the Dhamma. It happens only now, after ‘the change’. And I think I know why: because there is no other way to make me doubt myself, what else could Māra try? It seems he just needs some hostility/conceit on my part, together with lack of mindfulness in order to sow these thoughts. Yes, it hurts, but I’m just tired of giving in (suffering) in the same way as before.

I’m just curious whether others had/have similar experiences? The trouble is that there is no point in discussing these matters with people who cannot understand them. And those who probably can, seem to be very rare.

Other questions:

1) Do you think there is any *one* (!) other word that comes closer to the meaning of *anicca* than ‘impermanence’? I arrived at my current understanding mainly by contemplating ‘Unverfügbarkeit’, which in English seems to be ‘unavailability’. Another aspect is ‘contingency’—in

the way Sartre used that term, i.e. one cannot deduce things, one can only encounter them.

2) Is consciousness (as an aggregate) closer to the ‘appearance’ or to the ‘endurance/persistence’ of a thing? I ask because the term ‘presence’ just seems to be a hybrid between the two, i.e. a thing is ‘present’ when it (as *nāmarūpa*) endures/persists. From another point of view, consciousness could also be described as ‘availability’ of things when they are ‘within range’ of the senses. And from still another point of view, namely within the context of contact, consciousness can mean that eye and forms are ‘there’ in the sense that they structurally *precede* their meeting. So the meaning of ‘consciousness’ is not as clear or unambiguous to me as I would like to have it.

[M. 215]

8 January 2014

With regard to allegedly having ‘disparaged’ the Buddha/Dhamma, I can say that this topic has lost its relevance. I didn’t ‘fix’ it. It was just no longer important enough to waste my time with it.

Today I was visiting the dentist. When I lay on the dentist’s chair, I felt like ‘passing out’ and out of fear I decided that it was enough, certainly looking like a fool. (I say this without bitterness.) So I left without having the procedure done. I’m not going to ask you whether such a thing can happen to a *sotāpanna*. I rather want to say/show how much force there is behind this ‘anxiety disorder’ of mine, and this includes the habit of running away from threats. There are certainly a lot of people who think that you cannot be a *sotāpanna* (or higher) with such a ‘mental problem’. But at least *I* can say for sure that *without* that very problem, I wouldn’t be where I am, because one needs a good reason to strive. On the other hand it clearly showed that there is *more* to be done. And perhaps it’s only the *arahat* to whom such a mental problem is no longer manifest in any situation whatsoever (especially if he had it to the extent of a mental disorder before).

Reply to the letter of 3 January 2014:

[N. 125] 8 January 2014

Yes, indeed. Māra will pick any opportunity he gets in order to harass one, and until one's mind is developed and confidence established, it can happen fairly often (or more often on some days).

1. 'Contingency' would be good, but I think that word carries a lot of underlying views in this regard. People then might interpret *anicca* through those views. 'Impermanence' or 'not-permanence' is the only one vaguely fitting, I am afraid.

2. As an aggregate, consciousness is *outside* with the matter. Not of course literally with it, since their respective domains cannot merge, but it is as *external*—as matter. (Or rather the internal characteristic of consciousness is fundamentally *external*.) Thus, in order for a thing to appear or to persist, it has to be *given*, which means consciousness has to be there superimposed with the matter. (When this is seen then anything *internally* taken as 'mine', becomes 'not-mine'.) And consciousness cannot ever be seen, or accessed through a sense, since it structurally precedes any and all of them. It can be *known*. Does this address your question in any way?

Reply to the letter of 8 January 2014:

I'm glad that you have a fairly clear understanding of this. The 'mental problem' is dealt with the development of the mind (*samatha*) in a correct way, not through a 'meditation technique'. Despite one's understanding, if the mind lacks strength, Māra will tempt it more often and anxiety will come to it more often. It's just a question of patiently doing the strengthening work. In your case and with the background you refer to, where anxiety played such an important factor and motivator, I think you will have a few more, to say the least, of similar episodes. Try to develop strength to the point where it won't move you. When it realizes (after a while) that it cannot move you, despite whichever way it arises, then it will cease to arise too. This is the only way to stop it, since it arises of its own accord and, one trying to address that, would only amount to interfering, i.e. being moved.

[M. 216]

12 January 2014

Regarding point 2: I'm not sure whether this is related to it but, before my understanding reached the necessary strength, I repeatedly saw that 'the experience' is *real*, which is perhaps what you mean by 'external'. Or in other words: It's *there*, and this 'there' transcends the 'for-me' of the *puthujjana*, because it cannot be owned in any way, and there is no point to it either. It has nothing to do with anyone. That whole thing is empty of Self. At that time there was a strong and clear sense of 'no-one-ness'. No-one is there.

But there is also one thing about which I would like to hear your opinion. There is such a thing as 'worldlessness' or 'no-world' (in the broadest sense), and this has no condition. It is (structurally) prior to the meeting of eye and form, etc. I know that it is there, because seeing it (over one year ago) brought me on the path (as I see it). Perhaps not all people experience literal extinction, but I did. I told you many times about it, trying to 'understand' it. This is a thing one will never forget. It's beyond the scope of the senses (*Māra*). It makes their extinction possible, so to speak. But even this is not oneself, i.e. it has no owner. It just cannot *not* be, because it is that which 'is' when nothing is. I hope this doesn't sound like mystification.

[N. 126]

12 January 2014

You are correct. Your description of the 'real' world, is what I mean by 'external'. I also like to refer to it as 'given' or 'given beforehand', i.e. before one appropriates it. In that way it becomes clear that the sense of 'mine' depends upon that which is 'given' of its own accord and thus, cannot really be 'mine'.

The worldlessness you mentioned, if I didn't misunderstand you, seems to me like you are referring to the 'structure', i.e. that because of which the world as one knows it, through the senses, is. It structurally precedes it, and as such it is *impossible* to appropriate. That's why if seen as something upon which your world fundamentally depends, that whole

world ceases to be yours. So indeed, this very characteristic makes the extinction possible.

Let me know what you think and if I misunderstood what you were referring to.

[M. 217]

13 January 2014

I'm not yet sure whether this is a misunderstanding. I certainly don't qualify as someone who has 'experienced' *nirodha samāpatti* as 'meditative attainment', and yet I don't see how the cessation that happened to me is any different from it (except for duration). So the worldlessness I'm referring to is what came *after* the cessation. The point is that *one* is not there in order to bear witness to it. And that is also the difficulty in describing it. You—not only as a person, but also as an individual—can cease completely. And *then* ... What can I say? In a sense I can say nothing about it. *But it's real too*. I think that is the point I'm trying to make. There is *no end to reality*. A 'world' (the All) doesn't need to be manifest, but that means 'worldlessness', which is 'then' *real*, in a way *of its own*. One cannot go looking for it, because the price is oneself (as an individual too). And I had to see this in order to fully understand that the only escape is 'letting be' *even that*. One cannot bring 'reality' to an end. "It's over" is a reality too. "Not being there" is real too. And certainly one can crave for this too, which would be a mistake.

So perhaps you can judge now whether we were (at least roughly) talking about the same thing. And of course I would still like to hear your comments, so I might perhaps gain a better understanding of it. In a way, what I'm talking about is the *nightmare of the Self*. But *without* it, there would be no liberation. And this is what makes the struggle of the 'Buddhist' *puthujjana* for liberation so absurd and paradox: It cannot be *his* goal. So in retrospect I can see *how much saddha* I had in the Buddha. It was *unshakable* even before I had the necessary understanding. So despite all the pondering and philosophy and 'wisdom', I'm almost inclined to say that I'm the *faith type*. Not in the artificial sense of 'not caring much about wisdom', but in the sense of not giving up when wisdom is at its end, in the sense of trusting (him) that there is a way out and that *he* knows it,

even when I knew nothing. With so much doubt one needs faith, otherwise one will find enough 'reasons' to give up.

[N. 127]

20 January 2014

I think we were referring, more or less, to the same thing and the second part of the first paragraph assures me of this. More precisely, it seems to me that you are referring to the fundamental, and I mean this in a thorough sense, *infinity* and *independence* of the structure. Independence of such kind, whereby even one's not-being-there to experience it, makes no difference at all. And yes, even that 'not-being-there to experience it' is *real* and it's there, *independent*.

There is not much to add that you haven't thought before. For as long as there is a sense of 'mine' in regard to things, the 'worldlessness', the one that is simply 'real' and 'on its own', should be brought forward as often as possible. When one gets thoroughly accustomed to the knowledge of the 'impossibility of appropriation', the habit of appropriating, born of simple ignoring of the fact that the experience is impossible to appropriate, will slowly cease.

I find your reflection on the faith and your type very interesting and indeed quite plausible, considering that the faith was the main thread that kept you going through all the struggle.

One more thing, briefly: feel free to dismiss all the 'meditative attainment' attitudes and views about meditation (even Ven. Ñāṇavīra's) that are dominant in mainstream Buddhism. Those 'attainments' are not something a person attains by going through the sets of motions and prescribed techniques, but he attains it *through the establishment of mind* upon that respective *thing* (i.e. cessation, or infinitude of space, or consciousness, and so on). These things already involve some understanding of what a thing (phenomenon) is, of arising, ceasing, persisting while changing and so on. *Knowing it*, one can *mindfully* establish the *idea (dhamma)* of it, i.e. one can 'enter it'. The more one knows it, the broader one's mindfulness is, the easier that 'entering' will be (and the longer it will last).

Let me know if there is anything you would add, or if there still might be some misunderstanding.

[M. 218]

20 January 2014

As far as I can tell, there are no more misunderstandings with regard to this ‘worldlessness’ (and they seemed to be on my part only). And I’m relieved to hear about your ‘approval’, because it can be a burden to be ‘the only one’ (even amongst Buddhists), at least at my current stage.

You said: “feel free to dismiss all the ‘meditative attainment’ attitudes and views about meditation (even Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s) that are dominant in mainstream Buddhism.” It’s good that you say this, because it already happened, but I was not sure what to make of this. I was never a ‘meditator’, but now I’m even less. The only necessary thing I know is how to ‘drop’ that ‘whole thing’, to let it be. And *while* doing that, I can also be mindful of the body or whatever. But the application of a technique is just a pain (it comes close to rape).

Despite what I just said, it seems that the sense of self is now a little stronger again. It feels like an internal insecurity or wavering—like a justification for that obsessive ‘trying to understand’ to creep in again. But that might be just my way to proceed, I don’t know ... Close after the attainment, it seemed somewhat easier to intentionally access this ‘letting be’. Nevertheless, the cessation of that ‘central tension’⁶⁷ has established itself, it’s more or less *normal* now—despite the afore-mentioned problem. When I try to think about those sceptical scenarios, I somehow can’t. And as far as I can see, this is because I no longer need to look ‘beyond’ the experience to find something external (‘real’).

You wrote: “These things already involve some understanding of what a thing (phenomenon) is, of arising, ceasing, persisting while changing and so on.” I’m still troubled a bit with relation to this. Someone could say: “If you are no longer a *puthujjana*, you should be able to tell me something about impermanence, since you are supposed to have seen: ‘Whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing’.” But I actually couldn’t say much. Isn’t it a bit dubious that I could not describe my understanding in terms of that sentence? Perhaps it’s all ‘implicit’ in what

I have seen, but I cannot make it explicit, even to myself. Where is the arising, where is the ceasing? I should be able to answer it, shouldn't I? But I can't. I'm too late to have seen the arising, and too early to be able to see the ceasing. Can you say something about this?

[M. 219]

20 January 2014

In my last letter I said: "Nevertheless, the cessation of that 'central tension' has established itself, it's more or less *normal* now..." I didn't mean that this cessation was sometimes there and sometimes not. I meant that it is now no longer that 'new' or 'extraordinary'.

*

Letter 219, 20 January 2014, was the last correspondence to be included at the time of publishing.

67. Cf. CtP, p. 383.

III

Additional Texts

1

Questions on ‘With Birth, Death Applies’

Nick: Yes, but isn’t self-view involved, i.e. we think as *puthujjanas* and hold the view that we were born, into the world as we know it in our current circumstances, that they go back to our birth... so birth does mean born however we construe the idea... because we have a self view which involves the conception of a beginning we think of our birth and also have the idea we will end, i.e. decay and death... I see you quote NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA §9 and §10 but the interesting part (to me) is the beginning of 10:

“The fundamental *upādāna* or ‘holding’ is *attavāda* ... which is holding a belief in ‘self’. The *puthujjana* takes what appears to be his ‘self’ at face value; and so long as this goes on he continues to be a ‘self’ ... The *puthujjana* knows that people are born and die; and since he thinks ‘my self exists’ so he also thinks ‘my self was born’ and ‘my self will die’.”

Isn’t birth present as an idea or view and does refer to our being born. Bodhesako says the Buddha urges people to use common phrases so he must be referring to our birth in our current existence... The only view that I can see is that we have a view of our birth bound up with holding a self view. I don’t disagree with this article but feel that the ‘self view’ part has not been brought out. Ven. Ñāṇavīra also says in NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA §10 “The *puthujjana* sees a ‘self’ to whom the words birth and death apply.”

* * *

Bhikkhu N. Ñāṇamoli: Thank you for taking the time to write down your points, regarding the essay in question. Firstly let me say that I agree with you that the whole matter could have been dealt with through a description of the Self-view. However, the avoidance of this was resulting from a deliberate way of presenting the topic. The purpose of my essays in general is not to *explain* the experience, but to *describe* it, with hopes that some readers may see for themselves that which is being described. Thus, I could have said exactly the same as Ven. Ñāṇavīra did, and as you quote: “The fundamental *upādāna* or ‘holding’ is *attavāda* (see MN 11/i,67)), which is holding a belief in ‘self’” (NoD, NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA §10). The point is, however, that if I had done so I would have been liable to the same type of criticisms that people directed towards Ven. Ñāṇavīra. I know that quite a few people have rejected his description of *paṭiccasamuppāda* on account of not being able to accept ‘birth’ as something which is *present*. My aim was to affect their understanding on a different level, and in order to do so my approach had to be focused on showing *the nature of views* (with *attavāda* being the chief amongst them), as I thought I made clear in the opening paragraphs. As I said in the third paragraph—“[the nature of views] ... is to be ‘imposed’ onto things in one’s experience, while at the same time directly depending upon them.” Thus, by understanding the nature of views, the reader would indirectly understand the Self-view too, and then see for himself that Ven. Ñāṇavīra was *right* in his *paṭiccasamuppāda* formulation. I could have made these intentions clear in the beginning of my essay, but I feared that people might then regard it as some sort of a ‘thesis’ which I was trying to prove. In that way the reader has no need to engage, he can observe it from a distance and in the end decide whether the author was right or wrong, according to his opinion. It is that ‘opinion’ that I tried to undermine, albeit indirectly. Obviously, I am sorry if I have failed to do this.

You asked: “Isn’t birth present as an idea or view that does refer to our being born?” And my reply is in the third paragraph: “Thus, for a *puṭhujjana* coming-out-of-womb is that which is birth. His birth *exists*.” The subtle and crucial distinction is here: it is the *view* that refers us to the event of coming-out-of-womb, *not* ‘birth’ as you seem to suggest. *Jāti*

refers us to the *manifestation* (i.e. nature) of aggregates, which a *puthujjana* chooses to *identify* with the event of being born. By not seeing that it is *because* of his view that he thinks that his birth was in the past, a *puthujjana* takes his birth to *be* that which his view *points at*. And as long as he doesn't understand the nature of views, a *puthujjana* will not be able to escape them, and in our example escape from 'birth' as such. He remains a *puthujjana*.

Without going into too much detail here, for which people can simply re-read the essay, the point I was trying to make is that *jāti*, in *paṭiccasamuppāda* description, refers to *nature* of birth; and that nature is not the event in the past. By not seeing that nature, by not understanding 'birth', for a *puthujjana* birth exists in a same way that he exists, and for him *his birth is an event* in the past, the same as he is an occurrence in-the-world. But again that is not what is meant by *jāti* in *paṭiccasamuppāda* context. Thus, as long as a *puthujjana* is ignorant of the nature of things—in this case nature of birth particularly—the events in-the-world can apply to him: he *was* born and he *will* die. His being exists (cf. *NoD*, NOTE ON PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA §10 you already mentioned—"... he continues to *be* a 'self'." Also, note here that the *puthujjana*'s being *is* his *Self*, there is no temporal succession of these things—when *puthujjana* is, he is as *Self*). That's why I said that "...if one could manage, through an understanding of the Dhamma, to free oneself from 'being'—to bring it to an end—'birth' and 'aging-and-death' would cease to exist for one: all of the temporal occasions for suffering would cease to be one's suffering." (end of the third paragraph). And this is also why an *ariysāvaka* "...can by understanding 'birth', in the same sense that he would have understood the four noble truths—directly and timelessly—free oneself and become an *arahat*" (the fifth paragraph).

* * *

Nick: Thank you, Bhante, for your reply and further clarification. I have re-read your article several times and this has led me to think further on

the whole issue. I can now see more clearly how birth is a manifestation of the aggregates in the present!

2

Questions on ‘Hierarchy of Awareness’

Dhivan: I hope that this message finds you well and enjoying springtime. I have just finished reading those three essays that you sent me back in January. I’ve read them having also just finished re-reading Ven. Ñāṇavīra Thera’s book *Notes on Dhamma* in the new edition published last year (a very beautiful edition, a pity it is not in hardback like *Clearing the Path*). Once again I found the chapter on FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE quite unintelligible!—I have no idea what he is talking about. For the same reason I don’t really know what you are talking about in your essay *Hierarchy of Awareness*. Now, I regard myself as an intelligent person, and moreover I regard *Notes on Dhamma* as the most important book on Dhamma to have been published in English (wow, that’s quite a claim, yes?), so it is strange that I cannot understand the final chapter! If you would care to try to explain what it means, I would be very grateful. I know that Ven. Ñāṇavīra makes it clear that if a reader does not understand it, there is no problem, but I am still curious.

* * *

Bhikkhu N. Ñāṇamoli: Fundamental Structure, the way Ven. Ñāṇavīra presented it, is more of a *description* of a phenomenological world, than an explanation of a theory he had about the nature of our experience. In order to get an initial understanding one must forget about the scientific outlook we are all so accustomed to and see things in their nature, i.e. as

phenomena. The best example of the difference between the scientific outlook and the phenomenological one, is the most common mathematical question—“How much is one and one?.” If the purpose is science, we would say “two” (and perhaps add “of course” to our answer). However, if we are interested in the nature of things, our answer should say—“one.” This can also be extended, so the answer would remain the same even if the question was—“How much is one and one, and one, and one...?” The answer is always—*one*. If someone asks how much is one and two, you would say two. Why is this? It is because in the first instance we have *one thing*, while in the second we have *two*. No matter how many times someone presents you one thing, it will always be *one thing*, and the number of its appearances (which can go into infinity) would all point to the same nature of *that thing*. So, whether it is one here, and one over there, it remains *one nature* of the present thing, i.e. one phenomenon. In the second instance, we have one and two, i.e. *two different natures*, thus two different things.

Without going into further detail here, this is the attitude one has to have when one approaches Fundamental Structure, in order for it to be intelligible. This was Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s starting point and from there he was only describing the present experience, never abandoning the phenomenological outlook. Incidentally, I discovered that the scientific outlook can also be represented in Fundamental Structure as:

o	o	:	o	o
o	x	:	x	o
.....				
o	x	:	x	o
o	o	:	o	o

The fact that science is included within Fundamental Structure patterns as one of the possible ways you can regard things (i.e. *view* them), once they are given, only shows that it comes secondary to one’s experience, and it is often quite misleading, because *ignoring* the nature of the experience as a whole is a necessary prerequisite for science to arise.

Let me try to explain this more clearly. Ven. Ñāṇavīra said that he is trying to outline the framework “within which things exist.”⁶⁸ It is the existence of that very framework that usually deceives people into believing that things themselves are *permanent*. This is because the framework, or the nature of the nature of things (this also goes into infinity), appears as more stable and permanent⁶⁹ than other more *particular* things within it. Sometimes, even when some of those particular things are actually seen as impermanent, they are still being *held* (or *assumed*, as I prefer) as permanent. The reason for this is obvious—the framework *within which* they come to be is *assumed to be permanent*. So the only way of resolving this is to see that framework as impermanent, as something which *directly depends* upon things, and *vice versa*. The scientific or objective view *does not* acknowledge the impermanence of a thing at all, in the Buddha’s sense of the word, so the possibility of seeing the framework as impermanent is prevented from arising.

To explain this further we can use the figures from Fundamental Structure. We’ve seen that a thing can be represented as:

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o  o
o  x

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This arrangement represents *one aspect* of a thing, a *current* aspect. Obviously, there are three more positions that x can take so all of the combinations put together would look like:

```

o  o  |  o  o
o  x  |  x  o
-----
o  x  |  x  o
o  o  |  o  o

```

This picture represents a thing O, and this is how things appear in *immediacy*, like a simple O; we all know that, for example, when we are absorbed in worldly activities (i.e. unaware), things somehow are what

they are. They seem solid and completely enclosed in themselves. That is *O*. This representation above, however, *does not* reach the phenomenon of a thing, since it represents a *mere collection* of the four different aspects of that thing (x-s and o-s are all equally arranged, thus we have just *O*, regardless of how far the picture becomes expanded). So no matter how far our reflection goes, the picture above will still represent only *O* (for example—no matter how much detail of a certain thing we reveal, it is still the *same* thing). This is *science*; a collection of different aspects of a thing without really affecting that thing as a phenomenon.

As one can see from above, this collection cannot show the impermanence of *O*, and although the original experience gave us the glimpse of it in

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o  o
o  x

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the fact that we later represented it as

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o  o  |  o  o
o  x  |  x  o
-----
o  x  |  x  o
o  o  |  o  o

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means that we have removed it from our sight.⁷⁰ Again, this is the way science works, and that is what I meant when I said that it comes secondary to our experience and misrepresents it.⁷¹ If we want to stay true to the original experience of a thing

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o  o
o  x

```

we ought to represent it as

O	O	O	O
O	X	O	X
O	O	X	X
O	X	X	O

This picture maintains the nature of phenomena, which is the nature of *change*, i.e. impermanence. This is how things are seen in *reflexion*. In this representation, the *negative of a thing has been preserved*, thus that ‘stable’ and ‘permanent’ sense of a thing we had in immediacy is seen here as something that will change, thus it becomes ‘unstable’ and ‘impermanent’, or rather the original impermanence of a thing has been acknowledged and made more obvious (whether one recognizes it as impermanence or not is a different matter, e.g. *authenticity*, which doesn’t necessarily operate in terms of impermanence, though Heidegger’s way of discovering it was in repetitive acknowledgement and contemplation of one’s own death).

Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s Fundamental Structure is stricter than that which I have written above; stricter in the sense of mathematical approach, but nevertheless if one maintains the phenomenological attitude throughout, either of them will be intelligible and interchangeable. The paragraphs above might be able to help one in getting started with Fundamental Structure, and get to the same, or perhaps even deeper conclusions. The main point is that one has to recognize that a *positive* thing draws its existence from its *negative* possibilities. In other words, positive and negative are both responsible for forming our experience as a whole. Seeing this can be a starting point.

* * *

Dhivan: Many thanks for your message of—more than one year ago. I’m sorry I haven’t got round to replying. I have this habit—when I have a lot to do I leave messages in my Inbox and don’t get back to them. Finally I

have got back to your message as I am trying to empty my Inbox before going on retreat.

So I am still very interested of course in exploring Ven. Ñāṇavīra's thought, and so, as I look at your short explanation of Fundamental Structure again, I realise I need to raise questions exactly where they first arise. You write: "If the purpose is science, we would say 'two' (and perhaps add 'of course' to our answer). However, if we are interested in the nature of things, our answer should say 'one'."

Right here, I do not understand what you mean. Please understand, I know exactly what distinction you are making between the 'scientific' and 'phenomenological' ways of understanding. My question is more specifically about what you mean by saying that in experience we would ever say that one and one is one. Let me give an example. Suppose one monk walks into the Dhamma Hall, and then another monk walks into the Dhamma Hall. How many monks are in the Dhamma Hall? I would say 'two', not one.

* * *

Bhikkhu N. Ñāṇamoli: When I say "one and one are one" I refer to the *nature* of things. To use your example: if you as an observer see a monk walking into the Dhamma Hall, you at that moment have an experience (*erlebnis*) of a monk-walking-into-Dhamma-Hall. If then another monk walks in, indeed on one level (if you were concerned with the number of people coming into the Dhamma Hall), you would have to see that two-monks-walked-into-Dhamma-Hall. If however you were concerned with the nature of monks in your visual experience that nature would remain *unchanged* even if 5 or 25 monks walked in. Each and every one of them represents or brings forth the nature-of-a-monk. So how many monks are in the Dhamma Hall, two if you are interested in their number, *one* if it's their nature you are looking at—there is a nature of a monk present in the Dhamma Hall full of monks.

Do you see what I'm getting at? Crudely speaking it is that which is *in common* to two (or more) things that contains their nature and remains

unchanged despite the increase or decrease in the number of those things, and also despite the changes that occur within those things, unless the changes affect the actual nature of that thing—that which is ‘in common’—i.e. a monk disrobes, in which case the (nature of a) thing has ceased. This is what Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s Fundamental Structure deals with—the nature of things. The first nature is represented as ‘one’ when it stands for a thing (regardless of how many instances that thing has). Consequently a thing of a *different* nature is represented as ‘two’, and that is because it is ‘different’ only in comparison to the *original* thing, the one we took first, which means that the thing number two is *second*. And you will see this in your own experience—when there is a nature of a thing present [FIRST] (determined by more particular things that are in common), there are always ‘parts’ (for lack of a subtler term) of that experience that are ‘not in common’, and *this is what they have in common* [SECOND]. When the things-not-in-common change sufficiently (attention, intention, etc.) they take the place of the first thing—a change has occurred. Now we have a new thing that is present, but regardless of the number of times this happens, the (living) principle of first-second persists because every nature of a thing has its nature and this is what Fundamental Structure is all about—dealing with the nature(s) that are in common to all experiences (hence ‘fundamental’). Does this help?

* * *

Dhivan: Thanks again for your message. I’ve just been re-reading it.

I am not very convinced by the idea that there is only one nature-of-a-monk that could be said to walk into the Dhamma Hall. I can sort of see what you mean, but I am not convinced by it. It is hard for me to really believe that ‘being-a-monk’ is a *nature*, that is, an absolutely common quality which different monks (Ñāṇamoli and Abhinando) not only have in common but which make them one in nature. Of course, there is a common *description* to be made of Ñāṇamoli and Abhinando, that both of them are the same in that they are both monks. But nobody would say that they are therefore one. I would say this way of talking confuses

similarity with unity. Similarity, i.e. being the same, is of course a crucial category of thought, but it is not the same as unity, which is to say, being one.

However, perhaps 'being-a-monk' is not the best example for your purpose, since 'being-a-monk' is more or less a thing that exists through social convention. How about we consider the nature of 'being-a-human-being'. Now, one human being (a monk called Ñāṇamoli) walks into the Dhamma Hall. Another human being (a lay person called Dhivan) walks into the Dhamma Hall. We have two human beings in the Dhamma Hall. But there is only one kind of being in the Dhamma Hall, that is to say, there are numerically two of one and the same kind of being, that is, human being. If a dog now walks into the Dhamma Hall, or even a pack of dogs, then there are umpteen beings but only two kinds of being, human beings and dogs.

But even here I wonder how far you can really say that there is only *one* nature of a human being. Wouldn't we rather say that there are two human beings in the Dhamma Hall, and that they have a nature in common, which is the nature of being human? But again is this so-called 'nature' really anything other than that which the two human beings have in common? Is it really a *unity*? Or is it rather simply the similarity between the two human beings?—That is, it is not a numerical quality of being-one, but the quality of belonging to the same category of being.

This kind of issue has a very long history in Western philosophy. Plato tried to solve it with his theory of Forms. He said that the thing which made any individual thing a particular example of a more general thing is that it participates in the form of that thing. So two monks both participate in the form of a monk, and two dogs are dogs in that they participate in the form of dog. The trouble with this way of thinking is that you end up supposing that there is some superior realm populated by these strange pure forms (which is what Plato seemed to believe). Aristotle did not go along with Plato's theory of forms, and instead analysed things in a different way. He distinguished between the abstract form of something, like a monk, from its matter, which is to say, what it is made of. So the abstract form is more like what that thing has in common with other things like it, as these two things are noticed by a thinking person observing the two things.

I would say that the Buddha's way of looking at the nature of things was closer to Aristotle's than to Plato's. In later western philosophy the whole problem came to be understood as 'the problem of universals'. This problem is that of whether the forms, that is, the universal natures of things, exist independently of the matter, that is, the particular manifestations of things. The Platonic view is that universals exist independently, while the more Aristotelian view would be that universals don't really exist in an independent realm. The medieval way of talking about this was called 'nominalism'. This means that universal natures, like being-a-monk, or being-a-human-being, or being-a-dog, are *just names*, and these names are *just thoughts in the mind of the thinker*. The Buddha's teaching is usually considered very much in the nominalist camp. This only becomes completely explicit in later Buddhist philosophy, like that of Nāgārjuna, but it fits with the Pāli canon too.

So going back to your 'fundamental structure': are you saying that there is *really* only one 'nature-of-a-monk' that walks into the Dhamma Hall; or are you more supposing that the two or more monks share a common nature in *name*, i.e. they can be described in exactly the same way? I could go along with the latter proposition, though, to follow up what I was getting at a bit earlier, I would rather distinguish between *similarity* and *difference* than between *unity* and *diversity*. I would say that the several monks are *similar* by virtue of sharing the *nominal* characteristic of being monks, although they are *different* people; and I would say that it is not quite accurate to say that there is a *unity* of being-a-monk and a numerical diversity of monks at the same time.

Excuse me for thinking 'aloud' like this. It is a way for me to try to engage with your point of view (and therefore with Ñāṇavīra's point of view, which is important to me). By relating what you have written to Western philosophy it helps to expand the vocabulary and get us to state what we mean in different kinds of ways. Also, it helps me to try to relate what you're saying to my understanding of the Buddha's point of view, which I have taken to be a kind of nominalism.

* * *

Bhikkhu N. Nāṇamoli: Thank-you for your stimulating email. Apart from the occasional talk with someone, these kind of emails are the only exercise in thought that I have lately. Let me get straight to the point:

I agree the example of a-nature-of-a-monk was rather awkward, but nevertheless, I still think you failed to grasp what I meant. So far I could pinpoint the place where the difference arises and that is in the way we use the term 'nature'. In the example I gave, 'nature' was a synonym with 'experience' (*erlebnis*), or simply a 'thing' (*dhamma*). I got the impression (please correct me if I'm wrong) that for you 'nature' means something more, which is why having two things in common cannot *represent* the nature of two things (for me this simply means that having two things in common *can* be the *center* of the experience of *any* two or more things). Try and substitute 'nature' in my previous email with 'experience' and see if the same disagreement still arises. In this way you can see that anything is a nature, anything is a thing. And you don't have to look for a clear sign of similarity of two things in order to find the experience that is in common to the two. For example just the fact that you can *see* two things means they already have that in common (experience-of-sight). When you are aware of the sight, you are simultaneously aware of anything that can be seen, and being-aware-of-the-sight is a *thing*. (Here lies the principle of the practice of mindfulness and guarding of the sense doors.) So anything can become an object of your attention and that doesn't separate things (i.e. one, two, three), which is usually what they have in common (which can be as general as you please—the fundamental thing all things have in common is *name-and-matter*), can serve to show you the nature of things—the structure of your experience. Thus, when you have an experience-of-a-monk (in your visual field), that experience remains *unchanged* in its nature, regardless of the number of the monks that you see.

This brings me to the second, very important point which is—'attention'. And this is where I disagree with both Plato and Aristotle's examples you mention (and consequently with you, in thinking that the Buddha's teaching is similar to Aristotle's view). As I am sure you are aware attention plays a focal point in Dhamma. In AN 10:58 the Buddha said: *manasikāra sambhavā sabbe dhammā*, "all things originate through attention." This means that what we experience at any given moment,

whatever is the center of our actions and intentions is *determined* (formed) by attention. For me this is the pure phenomenology, since it gives priority to that which has *arisen* (regardless whether or not it is mental or material). You'll remember the parroting existentialists: "Existence *precedes* the essence." By having that which you attend to at this moment, as a more fundamental thing, prevents (or can prevent) one from falling into realism or idealism—it keeps one in the 'middle' so to speak. Plato's assumption of forms as separate entities is wrong for the reasons you pointed out. Aristotle's *dismissal* of forms as "abstractions" too misses the point since it gives the undeserved priority to the *materiality* of things. Aristotle, in order to solve Plato's dead end of an *idealist's* thinking, went to the other extreme of a *realist's* denial. What Plato has failed to see is that no matter how general a thing can become (forms) it will never be separated from its material aspect (which is what his notion of 'form' seems to do). This means that in the experience-of-five-dogs, the materiality of each and every one of those five dogs—their *plurality*, is the *singular* materiality for the experience-of-five-dogs, seen as a more general thing. So if Plato's 'form' is seen to directly depend upon the materiality of things experienced, there is no room for a separate realm of forms to appear. No matter how general, how abstract a thing is, it will always have its material determination. (I didn't say 'counterpart' since there are things you can conceive in your mind that you can find existing in the world of senses;⁷² I didn't say 'material origin' either, because that would give priority to the matter, as if somehow things originate *out of it*, which Sartre seemed to believe.) Everything is *nāmarūpa-viññāṇa*, or *viññāṇa-nāmarūpa*, depending on the *direction* your attention takes.

Aristotle's distinction between an abstract form and its matter is a gratuitous one, which in my eyes means that he too failed to see that 'attention' can take up anything that *appears*, as its object, as the *erlebnis*, even if that is an abstract thought. This means that no matter how abstract and remote a thought can be, it is still a *thing*, and as such it is *real*. The abstraction, in the abstract thing, is in relation to the material but only *after* the original relationship between the two has been *overlooked*. What I am trying to say here is that a thing is abstract only in

relation to its *assumed* materiality, not in relation to its *nature* (which is that of material determination).⁷³

In the light of what's said above, I find Nāgārjuna to be very much off the mark, together with the whole 'nominalist camp'. Saying that 'forms' are just names, and names are just thoughts in the mind of a thinker, destroys the phenomenal nature of experience (i.e. the Dhamma), in which 'names', 'abstractions' or 'just thoughts' are equally real phenomena as much as this chair or table are. They are different of course in so many ways, and depending on our attention we could say that their natures are different too. However, also depending on our attention, we can say that in a certain way their nature is the same, and that is—they both *appear*, if that is what the attention is concerned with. This is what a chair and an idea *have in common*—they both appear. Obviously giving the existential priority to that which is attended to at this moment⁷⁴ requires a lot of repetitive effort (the practice of Dhamma), and we'll all agree this is not an easy thing, especially when, as the Buddha says, the views of the whole world are already established into either annihilationists or eternalists (or realists and idealists—two poles of human thinking. Another digression...).

So yes, going back to the Fundamental Structure. Can you see it now in the light of what is said above? It's your attention that is the starting point and that it makes the whole difference. What Ven. Ñāṇavīra tried to explain in the Fundamental Structure, was that when you attend to *this*, you cannot *equally* attend to something else, which is why something else becomes *that*. And when I say that 'this' is *one*, I don't mean that in the sense of unity. I mean it as *one thing*, as something which is *first*, even if that one thing depends on many other things (many monks), the experience-of-'monkness' is *one*, at that given moment. Thus, 'this' is first, and 'that' is second. And both of them are determined by the same attention, it's just that 'that' is done so in a *negative* way (i.e. not-this, hence Ven. Ñāṇavīra had to go further and write it down as this-this for THIS, and this-that for THAT, and so on). When you ask: "or are you more supposing that the two or more monks share a common nature in *name*," to me this implies (and again please do correct me if I misunderstood you) that, while the two or more monks can share certain things as being

similar, their *real* nature remains unaffected by it. The way I see it, there is no ‘real nature’ existing independently in either the material or mental aspects of a thing. The nature is the experience, at that *particular moment*. Whatever you *attend to*, that is *real*. This simply means that on a different occasion that nature, that experience, may be different—i.e. it can *change* (even if in the course of our lifetime we never actually experience it differently). That’s why the Buddha said that the universal nature of things (pertaining to *all* things that appear and can appear) is that of *impermanence*.

When you say: “I would say that the several monks are *similar* by virtue of sharing the *nominal* characteristic of being monks, although they are *different* people,” for me this is apples and oranges: when nominal ceases to be abstract, the virtue of those characteristics your attention is set upon is that which is *present*, that which is *real*. The difference between them as people is a completely different thing, which means that the attention has strayed not from ‘this’ onto ‘that’, but from ‘this’ onto (new) ‘this’. That’s why the difference-between-people is also a *thing* (it is that which at that moment “brings” those people together, in your experience), and as such it can serve as a starting point for one’s investigation of the Fundamental Structure. But it is *within* ‘this’ that you have to look for ‘that’, since if the original attention changes ‘too much’ what you have is the new ‘this’, and the relationship between ‘this’ and ‘that’ has been overlooked. (Remember when the Buddha said that any experience can be described in terms of *saṅkhārā-saṅkhatadhammā*, determination-determined. That is the relationship I am talking about.)

I hope this makes things a bit clearer, or at least formulates new questions. I do apologize in case I was too blunt or repetitive, I reassure you no offence was intended—it’s just the way I think even to myself.

68. NoD, FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE, §3.

69. People don't necessarily see this, but they do *feel* it.

70. One might say that the *x* is still there in the picture, and that is indeed true, but instead of representing a fact that a given thing will change, it becomes the *property* of a permanent thing. This is very important to note. By doing this the unpleasant nature of impermanence is concealed from ourselves, because even if we acknowledge it, as the picture above does, it comes *secondary*, after the established sense of permanence (how often we hear scientists talking about the things constantly changing, without really making any difference to the amount of our existential suffering). The fact is that the objective outlook of the world can never remove the sense of impermanence of a thing (no matter how hard it tries), but what it can do is blind itself in regard to it.

71. This doesn't mean that science in good-faith is not possible.

72. What I am trying to distinguish here is the difference between one's ideas being *rooted* in 'matter', and one's ideas *intending* the 'matter'. The former relationship is existential, while the latter isn't. The famous example is of a unicorn, where one expects to be able to find a living unicorn, since it's thinkable. What is thinkable is a horse, a horn, perhaps wings too—what is thinkable is one's *imagination*. But this is a serious digression...

73. And *vice versa*. A material thing can never be seen as a raw matter—it will always have its name, designation—it will always be significant.

Cf. Ven. Ñāṇavīra's Marginalia to PTS: "*Adhivacana*—designation, appearance. *Paṭigha*—resistance, inertia, behaviour. In any experience both are present (i.e. cognized). Whatever appears behaves, and whatever behaves appears (however absently). But how a thing behaves is independent of its appearance, and *vice versa*. A thing is designated in terms of *vedanā*, *saññā*, etc., which make up the *nāmakāya*. It behaves as *pathavī*, *āpo*, etc., which make up the *rūpakāya*." (StP, p. 584)

74. This means changing one's views.

Questions on ‘Resistance and Designation’

Michael: I have just read your four recent postings on this site. I must admit that some of it is a bit beyond me but, as previously, I do appreciate your writings on the work of the Ven. Ñāṇavīra.

You probably do not need this, but I felt you should receive some feedback—in case you had the feeling that your postings were going unnoticed! Anyway, my comment is on your second posting “Resistance and Designation.” These are unfamiliar terms (in the context of name-and-matter) to me and I wonder why you introduce them. I wonder whether as an alternative you have any views on Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s own suggestion in RŪPA that ‘name’ could be seen as the “appearance of behaviour” and ‘matter’ as the “behaviour of appearance.” It was only a few years ago that a poster on the old NTDP chat-room drew my attention to this description of Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s and I have found it helpful ever since. I wonder whether you have any views or comments on this?

Using your phraseology, this would presumably mean that “He assumes that the behaviour of this appearance is this matter” and “He assumes that the appearance of this behaviour is this name.” This type of expression also seems to lead directly to the description you give in the third paragraph that follows immediately.

These remarks are sent not as a challenge but more as a dialogue from someone who makes no pretension about great achievements in this area and I would appreciate your feedback. As I say, I have enjoyed and benefited from your insightful comments previously to other posters.

* * *

Bhikkhu N. Ñāṇamoli: The reason why I was discussing *nāmarūpa* in terms of ‘designation’ and ‘resistance’ is DN 15, which is also found in NoD as an additional text. The Pāli terms are *adhivacana* and *paṭigha*. Also, the lack of explanations in my recent essays are intentional; I’m more concerned with presenting things in an *opanayiko* way, i.e. ‘leading’, making one see for oneself,—the order of things, their nature—not just accepting it on account of intellectual satisfaction and/or compatibility with the respective views.

That’s why it would be wrong to regard these recent essays as a commentary to Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s writings. Although they both point at the same things, NoD are slightly more ‘explanatory’ or ‘informative’, i.e. they are much *broader* in terms of the context, but they are *leading on* in a lesser degree. This is really good and useful in the beginning when one is trying understand what needs to be understood and learn *how to* regard and read the Suttas. Once this is accomplished one has to carry on further and forsake even that ‘existential’ approach one had in the beginning. That’s why I have taken for granted in my writings that the reader is already versed in Ven. Ñāṇavīra’s Notes and Letters, which can be considered as a *prerequisite* for understanding my more recent essays. In other words, whatever I write stands directly upon the way I have understood NoD, but it is not concerned with it (the concern are the Suttas, which were understood *through* NoD).

Resistance and Designation (R&D) could be described using ‘behaviour’ and ‘appearance’ in the following manner:

—Those tokens... by which the name-body is described,—they being absent, would designation-contact *appear* in the matter-body...

—Those tokens... by matter-body is described,—they being absent would resistance-contact *behave* in name-body...

[You will notice the absence of the term ‘manifestation’. Cf. R&D, para. 1, where “manifestations of ‘designation’ and ‘resistance’” are said to be the problem].

Or you could simply say:

—Those tokens... by which the name-body is described,—they being absent, would designation *contact* the matter-body...

—Those tokens... by which the matter-body is described,—they being absent would resistance *contact* name-body...

Or the way you put it is also fine, with a slight change:

—He assumes that behaviour of *this appearance* is that which is ‘matter’.

—He assumes that appearance of *this behaviour* is that which is ‘name’.

Assuming that it is ‘this appearance’ that behaves, that because of which behaviour is there *manifests* in the name-body. What is that because of which behaviour is there? ‘Matter’ is that because of which behaviour is there. But, since ‘matter’ can only be *known as* ‘behaviour’ then it is correct to say that behaviour is that because of which behaviour is there; or “in behaviour there is only behaviour,” or even more concisely: *behaviour behaves*. Thus, in thinking that it is the appearance that behaves, that behaviour, that resistance, *contacts* the name-body (it is manifested in it).

Assuming that it is ‘this behaviour’ that appears, that because of which appearance is there *manifests* in the matter-body. What is that because of which appearance is there? ‘Name’ is that because of which appearance is there. But, since ‘name’ can only be *known as* ‘appearance’ then it is correct to say that appearance is that because of which appearance is there; or “in appearance there is only appearance”; or even more concisely: *appearance appears*. Thus, in thinking that it is the behaviour that appears, that appearance, that designation, *contacts* the matter-body (it is manifested in it).

Thus, behaviour behaves and appearance appears, or resistance resists and designation designates. In this way behaviour *does not manifest* in appearance and appearance *does not manifest* in behaviour. (Or behaviour *does not contact* appearance, appearance *does not contact* behaviour.)

By not being manifest, they do not exist.

By not existing, they cannot be destroyed.

By not being destroyed, they cannot cause one to suffer.

Note here that above I have emphasized “known as” (among other things). This is because without paying the appropriate attention to it, one will inevitably fall into the assumption that ‘matter’ and ‘behaviour’ are the same (different, both...neither...) and that ‘name’ and ‘appearance’ are the same (different, both...neither...). This is why it is probably even more accurate to say ‘matter’ is *known from* ‘behaviour’, ‘name’ is *known from* ‘appearance’. ‘Matter matters’, ‘name names’.

* * *

Michael: I was not familiar with the Sutta terminology that you refer to. I appreciate that your approach is based on ‘practice’ and is not concerned with a merely intellectual understanding. Your writings suggest that you are a person who can hold many different points of view in your mind—alas, I am a person who needs things to be simple.

Am I right therefore in thinking that all the various points we have discussed could be phrased in a modified version of what you wrote? I.e.

He assumes that behaviour of this appearance is known as/from ‘matter’

He assumes that appearance of this behaviour is known as/from ‘name’.

* * *

Bhikkhu N. Ñāṇamoli: You could say:

He assumes that behaviour of this appearance is that which is 'matter'.

He assumes that appearance of this behaviour is that which is 'name'.

He does not know that 'name' and 'matter' can only be known as 'appearance' and 'behaviour', hence he *assumes* them to be that. With 'assumption', behaviour and appearance are *identified* (or conceived) with 'matter' and 'name' respectively, and then there are following directions that this identification (conceiving) can go:

behaviour (appearance) is the same as 'matter' (name),

behaviour (appearance) is different from 'matter' (name),

behaviour (appearance) is both-the-same-and-different from 'matter' (name),

behaviour (appearance) is neither-the-same-nor-different from 'matter' (name).

So the whole thing reads:

He assumes that behaviour of this appearance is that which is [the same as] 'matter'.

He assumes that behaviour of this appearance is that which is [different from] 'matter'.

He assumes that behaviour of this appearance is that which is [both-the-same-and-different from] 'matter'.

He assumes that behaviour of this appearance is that which is [neither-the-same-nor-different from] 'matter'.

Either way, for him, it is this appearance that *behaves*.

He assumes that appearance of this behaviour is that which is [the same as] ‘name’.

He assumes that appearance of this behaviour is that which is [different from] ‘name’.

He assumes that appearance of this behaviour is that which is [both-the-same-and-different from] ‘name’.

He assumes that appearance of this behaviour is that which is [neither-the-same-nor-different from] ‘name’.

Either way, for him, it is this behaviour that *appears*.

What needs to be seen is that it is the behaviour that behaves and the appearance that appears, and the identification, in any of the above possible ways, *cannot fundamentally make any difference at all*—behaviour will be behaving and appearance will be appearing, they cannot enter each others’ domains—the structure remains unaffected. Apart from the indifferent simultaneous presence of behaviour and appearance, there is no relationship between the two and that is the very reason why freedom from them both is possible. (Of course, until this is understood, that lack-of-understanding *will be* the relationship between the two.)

* * *

Michael: Thank-you once again Bhikkhu.

I appreciate your clarification of the distinction between how (for most of us) ‘behaviour appears’ in experience and that ‘appearance behaves’—but that (for one who sees) ‘behaviour behaves’ and ‘appearance appears’.

I suspect that this is very profound and important and is something I need to incorporate more into my life.

Glossary

a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, o, k, kh, g, gh, ñ, c, ch, j, jh, ñ, ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ, t, th, d, dh, n, p, ph, b, bh, m, y, r, l, ḷ, v, s,

h, ṃ

akālika — timeless, timelessness.

ajjhata-bahiddhā — internal-external.

attavāda — belief in self.

attā — self.

adhivacana — designation.

anattā — not-self.

anāgāmī — non-returner.

anicca — impermanent.

anidassana — non-indicative.

anuloma — with the grain.

arahat — worthy one.

ariya — noble.

ariyapuggala — noble individual.

ariyasāvaka — noble disciple.

arūpa — immaterial.

avijjā — ignorance.

asaṅkhata — non-determined.

asubha — foul.

asmimāna — the conceit ‘I am’.

ākāsa — space.

ānāpānasati — mindfulness of breathing.

āyatana — base.

āsava — taint.

opanayiko — leading on.

ucchedavāda — belief in annihilation.

uddhacca-kukkucca — distraction and worry.

upajjhāya — preceptor.

upasampadā — ordination (into the status of bhikkhu).

upādāna — assuming, holding.

upek(k)hā — equanimity.

uppakilesā — defilements.

kamma — action.

kammavipāka — result of action.

karuṇā — compassion.
kāma — sensuality.
kām'upādāna — assumption of sensuality.
kāya — body.
kālika — temporal.
kuṭi — hut.
kusala — skilful, good, wholesome.
khandha — aggregate.
cakkhundriya — eye-faculty.
citta — mind.
cetanā — intention.
chandarāga — desire-and-lust.
jāti — birth.
jānāti — cognizance.
jhāna — meditation.
ñāṇa — knowledge.
taṇhā — craving.
dāna — gift, esp. of a meal.
diṭṭhi — view.
dukkha — suffering.
deva (pl. *devā*) — deity.
devatā — deity.
dosa — hate.
dhamma — thing, Teaching, etc.
dhammacakkhu — eye of the dhamma.
dhātu — element.
nāma — name.
nāmarūpa — name-&-matter.
nibbāna — extinction.
nimitta — sign, object.
nirodha — cessation.
paccaya — condition.
pañcakkhandhā — five aggregates.
pañc'upādānakhandhā — five-assumed-aggregates.
paññā — wisdom.
paṭigha — resistance.
paṭiccasamuppāda — dependent origination.
paṭiloma — against the grain.
papañca — diversification.
pabhassaram — brightness.
puggala — individual.
puthujjana — worldlyling.
phassa — contact.
brahmacariya — the life of purity (i.e. celibacy).
bhante — sir (monastic address, junior to senior; seniors address juniors, and equals to equals, as *āvuso*).
bhavataṇhā — craving for being.
bhāvanā — development.

bhikkhu — monk.
magga — path.
maññana — conceiving.
manasikāra — attention.
mano — mind, intellect.
marāṇasati — mindfulness of death.
maṃsacakkhu — fleshly eye.
māna — conceit.
māyā — illusion.
micchādiṭṭhi — wrong view.
mūla — root.
mettā — friendliness, loving-kindness.
moha — delusion.
yoniso — proper.
rāga — lust.
rūpa — matter.
vāyāma — effort.
vicikicchā — doubt.
viññāṇa — consciousness.
vipassanā — insight.
vipāka — result.
virīya — energy.
vedanā — feeling.
saupādāna — with assumption or holding.
sakkāya — person; personality.
saṅkhāra — determination.
saṅgha — Order (of monks).
saññā — perception.
sati — mindfulness.
satipaṭṭhānā — foundations of mindfulness.
saddhā — faith, confidence.
sabba — all, every.
samatha — calmness; mental concentration.
samādhi — concentration.
samudaya — arising.
sampajañña — awareness.
sammādiṭṭhi — right view.
saḷāyatana — six bases.
sassatavāda — eternalist belief.
saṃsāra — running on (from existence to existence).
sīla — virtue, (right) conduct.
sīlabbata — morality and virtue; conduct and customs.
sukha — pleasure.
sekha — one in training
sotāpatti — entering the stream.
sotāpanna — stream-enterer.

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Doubt always remains present and it continuously needs fixing. But how to realize the ideal *meaning*, if not by following what others have done and by fulfilling commonly-accepted techniques and views? What is the real meaning of existence and suffering?

Meanings is not a book to give direct answers to such questions. There is nothing here that you can take up as a belief, an empty speculation or a theory. The author, Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero, refrains from *explaining* Dhamma, an act which he regards as mere psychological investigation and linearly-connected facts. Here is no intent to set up a fixed theory. What the author does do is *describe* the nature of experience as it is: not about this or that problem or fact in the world, but the experience as such—Dhamma, which has to be investigated with proper attention e.g. seeing the present simultaneous relationship of an arisen thing and its determination. With proper attention, the *being* of things is gradually revealed—and not understanding the *nature* of this being, the author says, is the fundamental ignorance. He then describes nothing but the nature, the *dhamma*, of things—not by looking for *the* meaning, but *understanding* meanings.

‘Essays’, the first part of the book, contains just that: descriptions of the experience. This is no doubt difficult material to digest: it demands that the reader *recognize* those described things in his own experience. Without developed mindfulness and right attention, these writings will be impossible to grasp.

The second part of the book, the ‘Correspondence with Mathias’, provides useful support in understanding the essays. This private correspondence has been taking place with a German friend, Mathias, since 2009.

The third part, ‘Additional Texts’, contains questions posted on www.pathpress.org by people who wanted to understand the essays and sought clarification, with answers by Ven. Nyanamoli. (Extract from Preface)

The author, Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero (Ninoslav Molnar), was born in Serbia in 1983 and at the age of twenty-two was ordained in the lineage of the Thai Forest Tradition. Currently he is living in Sri Lanka.



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